

STARTLING STORIES

THE LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR

By LEIGH BRACKETT

TAME ME THIS BEAST

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



Join the Well-Paid Ranks of the I.C.S.-TRAINED MEN

MANY THOUSANDS MORE ARE URGENTLY NEEDED. PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A BETTER POSITION AND BETTER PAY.

Ambitious men everywhere have succeeded through I.C.S. Home-Study Courses. So also can you.



We offer you the benefit of our 61 years of matchless experience in the creative planning of postal instruction.

If you need technical training, our advice on any matter concerning your work and your career is yours for the asking—free and without obligation. Let us send you full information about I.C.S. Training in the subject in which you are specially interested.

The successful man DOES today what the failure INTENDS doing tomorrow. WRITE TODAY to: Dept. 161A, I.C.S. Ltd., International Buildings, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

— USE THIS COUPON —

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS LTD.

Dept. 161A

INTERNATIONAL BUILDINGS, KINGSWAY, LONDON, W.C.2

Please send Special Free Booklet describing your Course

Name Surname

Name For

Address

Agencies for Correspondence Readers:
Australia: 140 Elizabeth Street, Sydney
Egypt: 40, Dar el Ahrar, El Khayma, Cairo
France: 10, Avenue Joffre, Clamart S.O.
India: Lalbhai Bhai, 10, Phoenix, Malabar Hill, Bombay
New Zealand: 110, Wakefield Street, Wellington
N.I. Ireland: 28, Howard Street, Dublin
South Africa: 40, Steynmarck Street, Cape Town

The I.C.S. offer Courses of Instruction in a wide range of subjects including:

Accountancy
Advertising
Air-Conditioning
Architectural Drawing and Designing
Architecture
Arithmetic

Baller Engineering
Book-keeping
Building Construction, Interior Work and Quantities
Building Specifications and Quantities
Business Management

Carpentry
Chemical Engineering
Chemistry, Inorganic and Organic
Civil Engineering
Clerk of Works
Coal Mining
Commercial Art
Commercial Training
Concrete Engineering

Civil Engineer
Draftsmanship (state which branch)

Electric Power, Lighting, Transmission and Traction
Electrical Engineering
Eng. Shop Practice

Finishing (Amble and Linework)

Fire Engineering
Foremanship
Fuel Technology

Heating and Ventilation
Horticulture
Hydraulic Engineering

Illustration Engineering
Jewellery
Jewellery

Lampwork
Machine Design
Machine-Tool Work
Marine Engineering
Mechanical Drawing
Mechanical Engineering
Mining Engineering
Motor Engineering
Motor Mechanic
Motor Vehicle Elec.
Municipal Engineering

Office Training
Oil-Power/Electrics

Plaster
Plumbing

Quantity Surveying

Radio Engineering
Radio Service Eng.
Refrigeration

Scholarship
Sales Management
Sanitary and Domestic

Engineering
Scientific Management
Structural Work
Sheet-Metal Work
Short-Story Writing
Steam Power Design
Structural Steelwork
Surveying (state which branch)

Television Technology
Water-Power Electricity
Welding, Gas and Electric
Woodworking, Drawing
Woodworking, Machine Tools
Works Engineering
Works Management

EXAMINATIONS—

Nearly all the more important Technical, Commercial, Professional, Educational and Civil Service Exams

I.C.S. Examination Students are Coached until Successful

Guarantee discount granted to members of I.C.S. Forces

(State your Exam. on Coupon for Free Booklet)



THE BEST IN SCIENTIFICTION

Startling Stories

No. 8

British Edition

Two Complete Novelets

THE LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR Leigh Brackett 4

An Earthman discovers that both love and tragedy live on in a long-dead city of Ancient Mars which denies death's reality.

BIRTHPLACE OF CREATION Edmond Hamilton 46

Curt Newton and the Futuramen are called on to protect the cosmos from the destructive activity of a dangerous madman.

Short Stories

THE INTRUDER Oliver Saari 25

What's it like to have an exact duplicate of yourself show up?

TAME ME THIS BEAST Robert Moore Williams 37

Professor Shaler thought his experiment would free humanity

Feature

HOW'S YOUR VOLTAGE? Science Facts 65

Published in England by Frederick's and Macmillan's Ltd. and distributed by World Distributors (UK) Limited Ltd., Oldlands House, Tattenhoe Street, Manchester, by arrangement with the publishers, Putnam, every other month by Grove Publications, Inc., 310 East 57th Street, New York 22, N.Y. Also as an occasional feature in the post office at Robinson Ltd., under the Act of March 1, 1947. Copyright, 1962, by Grove Publications, Inc. Printed in England by C.W. D. Ltd. (London, W.C.2). Issues of this journal's send in 1962-63 and 1963-64 are 100 copies. If the name of any young person or married individual is 19 1962-63 19 64



a novelet by LEIGH BRACKETT

I

HE CAME alas into the wine-shop, wrapped in a dark red cloak, with the cowl drawn over his head. He stood for a moment by the doorway and one of the slim dark predatory women who live in those places went to him, with a silvery chiming from the little bells that were almost all she wore.

I saw her smile up at him. And then, suddenly, the smile became fixed and

something happened to her eyes. She was no longer looking at the cloaked man but through him. In the oldest fashion—it was as though he had become invisible.

She went by him. Whether she passed some word along or not I couldn't tell but an empty space widened around the stranger. And no one looked at him. They did not avoid looking at him. They simply refused to see him.



An Earthman finds love and tragedy in a long-dead city of ancient Mars that denies death

THE LAST DAYS OF Shandakor

He began to walk slowly across the crowded room. He was very tall and he moved with a fluid, powerful grace that was beautiful to watch. People drifted out of his way, not seeming to, but doing so. The air was thick with nameless smells, shrill with the laughter of women.

Two tall barbarians, far gone in wine, were carrying on some intertribal feud and the yelling crowd had made room for them to fight. There was a silver pipe and a drum and a double-banked harp making odd wild music. Lithe brown bodies leaped and whirled through the laughter and the shouting and the smoke.

The stranger walked through all this, alone, untouched, unseen. He passed close to where I sat. Perhaps because I, of all the people in that place, not only saw him but stared at him, he gave me a glance of black eyes from under the shadow of his cowl—eyes like blown coals, bright with suffering and rage.

I caught only a glimpse of his muffled

face. The merest glimpse—but that was enough. Why did he have to show his face to me in that wine-shop in *Barrakesh*?

He passed on. There was no space in the shadowy corner where he went but space was made, a circle of it, a moat between the stranger and the crowd. He sat down. I saw him lay a coin on the outer edge of the table. Presently a serving wench came up, picked up the coin and set down a cup of wine. But it was as if she waited on an empty table.

I turned to Kardak, my head drover, a Shamed with massive shoulders and uncut hair braided in an intricate tribal knot. "What's all that about?" I asked.

Kardak shrugged. "Who knows?" He started to rise. "Come, soulless, it is time we got back to the arena."

"We're not leaving for hours yet. And don't lie to me, I've been on Mars a long time. What is that man? Where does he come from?"

Barrakesh is the gateway between north and south. Long ago, when there

were oceans in equatorial and southern Mars, when Valkea and Jekkara were proud seats of empire and not thieves' dens, here on the edge of the northern Drylands the great canyons had come and gone to Barrakesh for a thousand thousand years. It is a place of strangers.

In the time-worn streets of rock you see tall Keshi hillmen, nomads from the high plains of Upper Shun, lean dark men from the south who barter away the last of forgotten totems and temples, cosmopolitan sophisticates up from Kahora and the trade cities, where there are spaceports and all the appurtenances of modern civilization.

The red-robed stranger was none of these.

A GLIMPSE of a face—I am a planetary anthropologist. I was supposed to be charting Martian ethnology and I was doing it on a fellowship grant I had wrangled from a Terran university too ignorant to know that the vastness of Martian history makes such a project hopeless.

I was in Barrakesh, gathering an outfit preparatory to a year's study of the tribes of Upper Shun. And suddenly there had passed close by me a man with golden skin and un-Martian black eyes and a facial structure that belonged to no race I knew. I have seen the carved faces of fauns that were a little like it.

Kardak said again, "It is time to go, Jon Ross!"

I looked at the stranger, drinking his wine in silence and alone. "Very well, I'll ask him."

Kardak sighed. "Earthman," he said, "are not given much to wisdom." He turned and left me.

I crossed the room and stood beside the stranger. In the old courteous High Martian they speak in all the Low-Canal towns I asked permission to sit.

Those ugly, suffering eyes met mine. There was hatred in them, and scorn, and shame. "What breed of human are you?"

"I am an Earthman."

He said the name over as though he had heard it before and was trying to remember. "Earthman. Then it is as the winds have said, blowing across the desert—that Mars is dead and men from other worlds settle her dust." He looked out over the wine-shop and all the people who would not admit his presence. "Change," he whispered. "Death and change and the passing away of things."

The muscles of his face drew tight. He drank and I could see now that he had been drinking for a long time, for days, perhaps for weeks. There was a quiet madness on him.

"Why do the people shun you?"

"Only a man of Earth would need to ask," he said and made a sound of laughter, very dry and bitter.

I was thinking, A new race, an unknown race! I was thinking of the fame that sometimes comes to men who discover a new thing, and of a Chair I might sit in at the University if I added one bright unheard-of piece of the shadowy mosaic of Martian history. I had had my share of wine and a bit more. That Chair looked a mile high and made of gold.

The stranger said softly, "I go from place to place in this wallow of Barrakesh and everywhere it is the same. I have ceased to be." His white teeth glittered for an instant in the shadow of the eowl. "They were wiser than I, my people. When Shandakor is dead, we are dead also, whether our bodies live or not."

"Shandakor?" I said. It had a sound of distant bells.

"How should an Earthman know? Yes, Shandakor! Ask of the men of Kesh and the men of Shun! Ask the kings of Makh, who are half around the world! Ask of all the men of Mars—they have not forgotten Shandakor! But they will not tell you. It is a bitter shame to them, the memory and the name."

He stared out across the turbulent throng that filled the room and flowed

over to the noisy street outside. "And I am here among them—lost."

"Shandakor is dead?"

"Dying. There were three of us who did not want to die. We came south across the desert—one turned back, one perished in the sand, I am here in Bar-rakeesh." The metal of the wine-cup bent between his hands.

I said, "And you regret your coming."

"I should have stayed and died with Shandakor. I knew that now. But I cannot go back."

"Why not?" I was thinking how the

me, "What does an Earthman want in Shandakor?"

I told him. He laughed. "You study men," he said and laughed again, so that the red cloak rippled.

"If you want to go back I'll take you. If you don't, tell me where the city lies and I'll find it. Your race, your city, should have their place in history."

He said nothing but the wine had made me very shrewd and I could guess at what was going on in the stranger's mind. I got up.

"Consider it," I told him. "You can find me at the aeral by the northern

Master Painter

SOME few decades ago an artist was only a man or woman who painted pictures. The word was not applied to sculptors, to poets, to composers, to actors, to authors. You painted pictures or you wasn't an artist and that was that.

Fortunately the term was expanded to include anyone in any sort of work who does his job in artistic fashion—whether that work is juggling signs down like the late W. C. Fields or making buses like Tyrus Raymond Cobb. And authors, once fiction-writing is today rated as an art, are generally included the same.

Most of the time they don't see it—for the artist must always looking through the eyes of an audience that sees a thing with around the beholder and sends him into the mood the artist desires. It is a very special magic and only a very few authors have acquired an mastery.

Luigi Bertoni is certainly one of them. She can cast a mood-net more effectively than the most expert fishermen, can paint word-pictures that strike correspondingly vivid images in the mind and imagination of the reader. Using the same keyboard employed by her gifted authors she can evoke high tragedy, ecstasy, the awe and vision of unbearable beauty or decay or horror.

We have a handful of this magic folk here at her very best. There may be some who will say that it is not properly serious fiction. To which, as in the case of Ray Bradbury, we can only answer, "Why care?"

—THE EDITOR.

some John Ross would look, intruded in golden letters on the scroll of the discoverers.

"The desert is wide, Earthman. Too wide for one alone."

And I said, "I have a caravan. I am going north tonight."

A light came into his eyes, as strange and deadly that I was afraid. "No," he whispered. "No."

I sat in silence, looking out across the crowd that had forgotten me as well, because I sat with the stranger. A new race, an unknown city. And I was drunk.

After a long while the stranger asked

gate until the lesser moon is up. Then I'll be gone."

"Wait." His fingers fastened on my wrist. They hurt. I looked into his face and I did not like what I saw there. But, as Kardak had mentioned, I was not given much to wisdom.

The stranger said, "Your men will not go beyond the Walls of Karthodon."

"Then we'll go without them."

A long long silence. Then he said, "So be it."

I knew what he was thinking as plainly as though he had spoken the words. He was thinking that I was only an Earthman and that he would kill me

when we came in sight of Shandakor.

II

THE caravan tracks branch off at the Wells of Karthodon. One goes westward into Shun and one goes north through the passes of Outer Kesh. But there is a third one, more ancient than the others. It goes toward the east and it is never used. The deep rock wells are dry and the stone-built shelters have vanished under the rolling dunes. It is not until the track begins to climb the mountains that there are even memories.

Kardak refused politely to go beyond the Wells. He would wait for me, he said, a certain length of time, and if I came back we would go on into Shun. If I didn't—well, his full pay was left in charge of the local headman. He would collect it and go home. He had not liked having the stranger with us. He had doubled his price.

In all that long march up from Bar-rakesh I had not been able to get a word out of Kardak or the men concerning Shandakor. The stranger had not spoken either. He had told me his name—Corin—and nothing more. Cloaked and cowed he rode alone and brooded. His private devils were still with him and he had a new one now—impatience. He would have ridden us all to death if I had let him.

So Corin and I went east alone from Karthodon, with two led animals and all the water we could carry. And now I could not hold him back.

"There is no time to stop," he said. "The days are running out. There is no time!"

When we reached the mountains we had only three animals left and when we crossed the first ridge we were afoot and leading the one remaining beast which carried the dwindling water skins.

We were following a road now. Partly new and partly worn it led up and over the mountains, these naked lean-

ing mountains that were full of silence and peopled only with the shapes of red rock that the wind had carved.

"Armies used to come this way," said Corin. "Kings and caravans and beggars and human slaves, singers and dancing girls and the embassies of princes. This was the road to Shandakor."

And we went along it at a madman's pace.

The beast fell in a slide of rock and broke its neck and we carried the last water skin between us. It was not a heavy burden. It grew lighter and then was almost gone.

One afternoon, long before sunset, Corin said abruptly, "We will stop here."

The road went steeply up before us. There was nothing to be seen or heard. Corin sat down in the drifted dust. I crouched down too, a little distance from him. I watched him. His face was hidden and he did not speak.

The shadows thickened in that deep and narrow way. Overhead the strip of sky flared saffron and then red—and then the bright cruel stars came out. The wind worked at its cutting and polishing of stone, muttering to itself, an old and senile wind full of dissatisfaction and complaint. There was the dry faint click of falling pebbles.

The gun felt cold in my hand, covered with my cloak. I did not want to use it. But I did not want to die here on this silent pathway of vanished armies and caravans and kings.

A shaft of greenish moonlight crept down between the walls. Corin stood up.

"Twice now I have followed lies. Here I am met at last by truth."

I said, "I don't understand you."

"I thought I could escape the destruction. That was a lie. Then I thought I could return to share it. That too was a lie. Now I see the truth. Shandakor is dying. I fled from that dying, which is the end of the city and the end of my race. The shame of flight is on me and

"I can never go back."

"What will you do?"

"I will die here."

"And I?"

"Did you think," asked Corin softly, "that I would bring an alien creature in to watch the end of Shandakor?"

I MOVED first. I didn't know what weapons he might have, hidden under that dark red cloak. I threw myself over on the dusty rock. Something went past my head with a hiss and a rattle and a flame of light and then I cut the legs from under him and he fell down forward and I got on top of him, very fast.

He had vitality. I had to hit his head twice against the rock before I could take out of his hands the vicious little instrument of metal rods. I threw it far away. I could not feel any other weapons on him except a knife and I took that, too. Then I got up.

I said, "I will carry you to Shandakor."

He lay still, draped in the tumbled folds of his cloak. His breath made a harsh sighing in his throat. "So be it." And then he asked for water.

I went to where the skin lay and picked it up, thinking that there was perhaps a cupful left. I didn't hear him move. What he did was done very silently with a sharp-edged ornament. I brought him the water and it was already over. I tried to lift him up. His eyes looked at me with a curiously brilliant look. Then he whispered three words, in a language I didn't know, and died. I let him down again.

His blood had poured out across the dust. And even in the moonlight I could see that it was not the color of human blood.

I crouched there for a long while, overcome with a strange sickness. Then I reached out and pushed that red cow! back to bare his head. It was a beautiful head. I had never seen it. If I had, I would not have gone alone with Corin into the mountains. I would have understood many things if I had seen it and

not for fame nor money would I have gone to Shandakor.

His skull was narrow and arched and the shaping of the bones was very fine. On that skull was a covering of short curling fibres that had an almost metallic luster in the moonlight, silvery and bright. They stirred under my hand, soft silken wires responding of themselves to an alien touch. And even as I took my hand away the luster faded from them and the texture changed.

When I touched them again they did not stir. Corin's ears were pointed and there were silvery tufts on the tips of them. On them and on his forearms and his breast were the faint, faint memories of scales, a powdering of shining dust across the golden skin. I looked at his teeth and they were not human either.

I knew now why Corin had laughed when I told him that I studied men.

It was very still. I could hear the falling of pebbles and the little stones that rolled all lonesome down the cliffs and the shift and whisper of dust in the settling cracks. The Walls of Karthodon were far away. Too far by several lifetimes for one man on foot with a cup of water.

I looked at the road that went steep and narrow on ahead. I looked at Corin. The wind was cold and the shaft of moonlight was growing thin. I did not want to stay alone in the dark with Corin.

I rose and went on along the road that led to Shandakor.

It was a long climb but not a long way. The road came out between two pinnacles of rock. Below that gateway, far below in the light of the little low moons that pass so swiftly over Mara, there was a mountain valley.

Once around that valley there were great peaks crowned with snow and crags of black and crimson where the flying hawks nested, the hawk-hawks with the red eyes. Below the crags there were forests, purple and green and gold, and a black taro deep on the valley floor. But when I saw it it was dead. The peaks had fallen away and

the forests were gone and the town was only a pit in the naked rock.

In the midst of that desolation stood a fortress city.

There were lights in it, soft lights of many colors. The outer walls stood up, black and massive, a barrier against the creeping dust, and within them was an island of life. The high towers were not ruined. The lights burned among them and there was movement in the streets.

A LIVING city—and Corin had said that Shandaker was almost dead.

A rich and living city. I did not understand. But I knew one thing. Those who moved along the distant streets of Shandaker were not human.

I stood shivering in that windy pass. The bright towers of the city beckoned and there was something unnatural about all light life in the deathly valley. And then I thought that human or not the people of Shandaker might sell me water and a beast to carry it and I could get away out of these mountains, back to the Wells.

The road broadened, winding down the slope. I walked in the middle of it, not expecting anything. And suddenly two men came out of nowhere and barred the way.

I yelled. I jumped backward with my heart pounding and the sweat pouring off me. I saw their broadswords glitter in the moonlight. And they laughed.

They were human. One was a tall red barbarian from Mekh, which lay to the east half around Mara. The other was a leaner browner man from Taarak, which was farther still. I was scared and angry and astounded and I asked a foolish question.

"What are you doing here?"

"We wait," said the man of Taarak. He made a circle with his arm to take in all the darkling slopes around the valley. "From Kesh and Shun, from all the countries of the Norlands and the Marches men have come, to wait. And you?"

"I'm lost," I said. "I'm an Earth-

man and I have no quarrel with anyone." I was still shaking but now it was with relief. I would not have to go to Shandaker. If there was a barbarian army gathered here it must have supplies and I could deal with them.

I told them what I needed. "I can pay for them, pay well."

They looked at each other.

"Very well. Come and you can bargain with the chief."

They fell in on either side of me. We walked three paces and then I was on my face in the dirt and they were all over me like two great wildcats. When they were finished they had everything I owned except the few articles of clothing for which they had no use. I got up again, wiping the blood from my mouth.

"For an outlander," said the man of Mekh, "you fight well." He chinked my money-bag up and down in his palm, feeling the weight of it, and then he handed me the leather bottle that hung at his side. "Drink," he told me. "That much I can't deny you. But our water must be carried a long way across these mountains and we have none to waste on Earthmen."

I was not proud. I emptied his bottle for him. And the man of Taarak said, smiling, "Go on to Shandaker. Perhaps they will give you water."

"But you've taken all my money?"

"They are rich in Shandaker. They don't need money. Go ask them for water."

They stood there, laughing at some secret joke of their own, and I did not like the sound of it. I could have killed them both and danced on their bodies but they had left me nothing but my bare hands to fight with. So presently I turned and went on and left them grinning in the dark behind me.

The road led down and out across the plain. I could feel eyes watching me, the eyes of the sentinels on the rounding slopes, piercing the dim moonlight. The walls of the city began to rise higher and higher. They hid everything but the top of one tall tower that had a queer

squat globe on top of it. Reds of crystal projected from the globe. It revolved slowly and the reds sparkled with a sort of white fire that was just on the edge of seeing.

A causeway lifted toward the Western Gate. I mounted it, going very slowly, not wanting to go at all. And now I could see that the gate was open. Open—and this was a city under siege!

I stood still for some time, trying to puzzle out what meaning this might have—an army that did not attack and a city with open gates. I could not find a meaning. There were soldiers on the walls but they were lounging at their ease under the bright banners. Beyond the gate many people moved about but they were intent on their own affairs. I could not hear their voices.

I crept closer, closer still. Nothing happened. The sentries did not challenge me and no one spoke.

You know how necessity can force a man against his judgment and against his will?

I entered Shandakor.

III

THERE was an open space beyond the gate, a square large enough to hold an army. Around its edges were the stalls of merchants. Their canopies were of rich woven stuffs and the wares they sold were such things as have not been seen on Mars for more centuries than men can remember.

There were fruits and rare furs, the long-lost dyes that never fade, furnishings carved from vanished woods. There were spices and wines and exquisite cloths. In one place a merchant from the far south offered a ceremonial rug woven from the long bright hair of virgins. And it was new.

These merchants were all human. The nationalities of some of them I knew. Others I could guess at from traditional accounts. Some were utterly unknown.

Of the throngs that moved about

among the stalls, quite a number were human also. There were merchant princes come to barter and there were companies of slaves on their way to the auction block. But the others . . .

I stayed where I was, pressed into a shadowy corner by the gate, and the chill that was on me was not all from the night wind.

The golden-skinned silver-crested lords of Shandakor I knew well enough from Corin. I say lords because that is how they bore themselves, walking proudly in their own place, attended by human slaves. And the humans who were not slaves made way for them and were most deferential as though they knew that they were greatly favored to be allowed inside the city at all. The women of Shandakor were very beautiful, slim golden sprites with their bright eyes and pointed ears.

And there were others. Slender creatures with great wings, some who were lithe and furred, some who were hairless and ugly and moved with a sinuous gliding, some so strangely shaped and colored that I could not even guess at their possible evolution.

The lost races of Mars. The ancient races, of whose pride and power nothing was left but the half-forgotten tales of old men in the farthest corners of the planet. Even I, who had made the anthropological history of Mars my business, had never heard of them except as the distorted shapes of legend, as satyrs and giants used to be known on Earth.

Yet here they were in gorgeous trappings, served by naked humans whose fetters were made of precious metals. And before them too the merchants drew aside and bowed.

The lights burned, many-colored—not the torches and cressets of the Mars I knew but cool radiances that fell from crystal globes. The walls of the buildings that rose around the market place were faced with rare veined marbles and the fluted towers that crowned them were inlaid with turquoise and cinnamon, with amber and jade and the

wonderful corals of the southern oceans.

The splendid robes and the naked bodies moved in a swirling pattern about the square. There was buying and selling and I could see the mouths of the people open and shut. The mouths of the women laughed. But in all that crowded place there was no sound. No voice, no scuff of sandal, no clink of mail. There was only silence, the utter stillness of deserted places.

I began to understand why there was no need to shut the gates. No superstitious barbarian would venture himself into a city peopled by living phantoms.

And I—I was civilized. I was, in my non-mechanical way, a scientist. And had I not been trapped by my need for water and supplies I would have run away right out of the valley. But I had no place to run to and so I stayed and sweated and gagged on the acrid taste of fear.

WHAT were these creatures that made no sound? Ghosts—images—dreams? The human and the non-human, the ancient, the proud, the lost and forgotten who were so immensely present—did they have some subtle form of life I knew nothing about? Could they see me as I saw them? Did they have thought and volition of their own?

It was the solidity of them, the intense and perfectly prosaic business in which they were engaged. Ghosts do not barter. They do not hang jeweled necklets upon their women nor argue about the price of a studded harness.

The solidity and the silence—that was the worst of it. If there had been one small living sound . . .

A dying city, Corin had said. The days are running out. What if they had run out? What if I were here in this massive pile of stone with all its countless rooms and streets and galleries and hidden ways, alone with the lights and the soundless phantoms?

Pure terror is a nasty thing. I had it then.

I began to move, very cautiously, along the wall. I wanted to get away from that market place. One of the hairless gliding non-humans was bartering for a female slave. The girl was shrieking. I could see every drawn muscle in her face, the spasmodic working of her throat. Not the faintest sound came out.

I found a street that paralleled the wall. I went along it, catching glimpses of people—human people—inside the lighted buildings. Now and then men passed me and I hid from them. There was still no sound. I was careful how I set my feet. Somehow I had the idea that if I made a noise something terrible would happen.

A group of merchants came toward me. I stepped back into an archway and suddenly from behind me there came three spangled women of the serais. I was caught.

I did not want those silent laughing women to touch me. I leaped back toward the street and the merchants paused, turning their heads. I thought that they had seen me. I hesitated and the women came on. Their painted eyes shone and their red lips glistened. The ornaments on their bodies flashed. They walked straight into me.

I made noise then, all I had in my lungs. And the women passed through me. They spoke to the merchants and the merchants laughed. They went off together down the street. They hadn't seen me. They hadn't heard me. And when I got in their way I was no more than a shadow. They passed through me.

I sat down on the stones of the street and tried to think. I sat for a long time. Men and women walked through me as through the empty air. I sought to remember any sudden pain, as of an arrow in the back that might have killed me between two seconds, so that I hadn't known about it. It seemed more likely that I should be the ghost than the other way around.

I couldn't remember. My body felt solid to my hands as did the stones I sat on. They were cold and finally the cold got me up and sent me on again. There was no reason to hide any more. I walked down the middle of the street and I got used to not turning aside.

I came to another wall, running at right angles back into the city. I followed that and it curved around gradually until I found myself back at the market place, at the inner end of it. There was a gateway, with the main part of the city beyond it, and the wall continued. The non-humans passed back and forth through the gate but no human did except the slaves. I realized then that all this section was a ghetto for the humans who came to Shandakor with the caravans.

I remembered how Corin had felt about me. And I wondered—granted that I were still alive and that some of the people of Shandakor were still on the same plane as myself—how they would feel about me if I trespassed in their city.

There was a fountain in the market-place. The water sprang up sparkling in the colored light and filled a wide basin of carved stone. Men and women were drinking from it. I went to the fountain but when I put my hands in it all I felt was a dry basin filled with dust. I lifted my hands and let the dust trickle from them. I could see it clearly. But I saw the water too. A child leaned over and splashed it and it wetted the garments of the people. They struck the child and he cried and there was no sound.

I went on through the gate that was forbidden to the human race.

The avenues were wide. There were trees and flowers, wide parks and garden villas, great buildings as graceful as they were tall. A wise proud city, ancient in culture but not decayed, as beautiful as Athens but rich and strange, with a touch of the alien in every line of it. Can you think what it was like to walk in that city, among the

silent throngs that were not human—to see the glory of it, that was not human either?

The towers of jade and cinnamon, the golden wirenets, the lights and the colored silks, the enjoyment and the strength. And the people of Shandakor! No matter how far their souls have gone they will never forgive me.

How long I wandered I don't know. I had almost lost my fear in wonder at what I saw. And then, all at once in that deathly stillness, I heard a sound—the quick, soft scuffling of sandaled feet.

IV

I STOPPED where I was, in the middle of a plaza. The tall silver-crowned ones drank wine under canopies of dusky blooms and in the center a score of winged girls as lovely as swans danced a slow strange measure that was more like flight than dancing. I looked all around. There were many people. How could you tell which one had made a noise?

Silence.

I turned and ran across the marble paving. I ran hard and then suddenly I stopped again, listening. *Scuff-scuff*—no more than a whisper, very light and swift. I spun around but it was gone. The soundless people walked and the dancers wore and shifted, spreading their white wings.

Someone was watching me. Some one of those indifferent shadows was not a shadow.

I went on. Wide streets led off from the plaza. I took one of them. I tried the trick of shifting pace and two or three times I caught the echo of other steps than mine. Once I knew it was deliberate. Whoever followed me slipped silently among the noiseless crowd, blending with them, protected by them, only making a show of footsteps now and then to goad me.

I spoke to that mocking presence. I talked to it and listened to my own voice

ringing hollow from the walls. The groups of people clobbered and flowed around me and there was no answer.

I tried making sudden leaps here and there among the passers-by with my arms outspread. But all I caught was empty air. I wanted a place to hide and there was none.

The street was long. I went its length and the someone followed me. There were many buildings, all lighted and populous and deathly still. I thought of trying to hide in the buildings but I could not bear to be closed in between walls with those people who were not people.

I came into a great circle, where a number of avenues met around the very tall tower I had seen with the revolving globe on top of it. I hesitated, not knowing which way to go. Someone was sobbing and I realized that it was myself, laboring to breathe. Sweat ran into the corners of my mouth and it was cold, and bitter.

A pebble dropped at my feet with a brittle click.

I bolted out across the square. Four or five times, without reason, like a rabbit caught in the open, I clanged course and fetched up with my back against an ornamental pillar. From somewhere there came a sound of laughter.

I began to yell. I don't know what I said. Finally I stopped and there was only the silence and the passing through, who did not see nor hear me. And now it seemed to me that the silence was full of whispers just below the threshold of hearing.

A second pebble clattered off the pillar above my head. Another stung my back. I sprang away from the pillar. There was laughter and I ran.

There were infinites of streets, all glowing with color. There were many faces, strange faces, and robes blown out on a night wind, liters with scarlet curtains and beautiful cars like chariots drawn by beasts. They flowed past me like smoke, without sound, without sub-

stance, and the laughter passed me, and I ran.

Four men of Shandakor came toward me. I plunged through them but their bodies opposed mine, their heads caught me and I could see their eyes, their black shining eyes, looking at me . . .

I struggled briefly and then it was suddenly very dark.

The darkness caught me up and took me somewhere. Voices talked far away. One of them was a light young shiny sort of voice. It matched the laughter that had haunted me down the streets. I hated it.

I hated it so much that I fought to get free of the black river that was carrying me. There was a vertiginous whirling of light and sound and stubborn shadow and then things steadied down and I was ashamed of myself for having passed out.

I was in a room. It was fairly large, very beautiful, very old, the first place I had seen in Shandakor that showed real age—Martian age, that runs back before history had begun on Earth. The floor, of some magnificent amber stone the color of a moonless night, and the pale slim pillars that upheld the arching roof all showed the hollowings and smoothnesses of centuries. The wall paintings had dimmed and softened and the rugs that burned in pools of color on that dusky floor were worn as thin as silk.

There were men and women in that room, the alien folk of Shandakor. But these breathed and spoke and were alive. One of them, a girl-child with slender thighs and little pointed breasts, leaned against a pillar close beside me. Her black eyes watched me, full of dancing lights. When she saw that I was awake again she smiled and flicked a pebble at my feet.

I got up. I wanted to get that golden body between my hands and make it scream. And she said in High Martian, "Are you a human? I have never seen one before close to."

A MAN in a dark robe said, "Be still, Duani." He came and stood before me. He did not seem to be armed but others were and I remembered Corin's little weapon. I got hold of myself and did none of the things I wanted to do.

"What are you doing here?" asked the man in the dark robe.

I told him about myself and Corin, omitting only the fight that he and I had had before he died, and I told him how the hellmen had robbed me.

"They sent me here," I finished, "to ask for water."

Someone made a harsh humorless sound. The man before me said, "They were in a jesting mood."

"Surely you can spare some water and a beast!"

"Our beasts were slaughtered long ago. And as for water . . ." He paused, then asked bitterly, "Don't you understand? We are dying here of thirst!"

I looked at him and at the shopman called Duani and the others. "You don't show any signs of it," I said.

"You saw how the human tribes have gathered like wolves upon the hills. What do you think they wait for? A year ago they found and cut the buried aqueduct that brought water into Shandakor from the polar cap. All they needed then was patience. And their time is very near. The store we had in the cisterns is almost gone."

A certain anger at their subservience made me say, "Why do you stay here and die like mice bottled up in a jar? You could have fought your way out. I've seen your weapons."

"Our weapons are old and we are very few. And suppose that some of us did survive—tell me again, Earthman, how did Corin fare in the world of men?" He shook his head. "Once we were great and Shandakor was mighty. The human tribes of half a world paid tribute to us. We are only the last poor shadow of our race but we will not beg from men!"

"Besides," said Duani softly, "where else could we live but in Shandakor?"

"What about the others?" I asked. "The silent ones."

"They are the past," said the dark-robed man and his voice rang like a distant flare of trumpets.

Still I did not understand. I did not understand at all. But before I could ask more questions a man came up and said, "Rhu! he will have to die."

The tufted tips of Duani's ears quivered and her crest of silver curls came almost erect.

"No, Rhu!" she cried. "At least not right away."

There was a clamor from the others, chiefly in a rapid angular speech that must have predated all the syllables of men. And the one who had spoken before to Rhu repeated, "He will have to die! He has no place here. And we can't spare water."

"I'll share mine with him," said Duani, "for awhile."

I didn't want any favors from her and said so. "I came here after supplies. You haven't any, so I'll go away again. It's as simple as that." I couldn't buy from the barbarians, but I might make shift to steal.

Rhu shook his head. "I'm afraid not. We are only a handful. For years our single defense has been the living ghosts of our past who walk the streets, the shadows who man the walls. The barbarians believe in enchantments. If you were to enter Shandakor and leave it again alive the barbarians would know that the enchantment cannot kill. They would not wait any longer."

Angrily, because I was afraid, I said, "I can't see what difference that would make. You're going to die in a short while anyway."

"But in our own way, Earthman, and in our own time. Perhaps, being human, you can't understand that. It is a question of pride. The oldest race of Mars will end well, as it began."

He turned away with a small nod of the head that said *kill him*—as easily as that. And I saw the ugly little weapons rise.

THERE was a split second then that seemed like a year. I thought of many things but none of them were any good. It was a devil of a place to die without even a human hand to help me under. And then Duani flung her arms around me.

"You're all so full of dying and big thoughts!" she yelled at them. "And you're all paired off or so old you can't do anything but think! What about me? I don't have anyone to talk to and I'm sick of wandering alone, thinking how I'm going to die! Let me have him just for a little while? I told you I'd share my water."

On Earth a child might talk that way about a stray dog. And it is written in an old Book that a live dog is better than a dead lion. I hoped they would let her keep me.

They did. Rhul looked at Duani with a sort of weary compassion and lifted his hand. "Wait," he said to the men with the weapons. "I have thought how this human may be useful to us. We have so little time left now that it is a pity to waste any of it, yet much of it must be used up in tending the machine. He could do that labor—and a man can keep alive on very little water."

The others thought that over. Some of them dissented violently, not so much on the grounds of water as that it was unthinkable that a human should intrude on the last days of Shandaker. Corin had said the same thing. But Rhul was an old man. The tuffs of his pointed ears were colorless as glass and his face was graven deep with years and wisdom had distilled in him its bitter brew.

"A human of our own world, yes. But this man is of Earth and the men of Earth will come to be the new rulers of Mars as we were the old. And Mars will love them no better than she did us because they are as alien as we. So it is not unfitting that he should see us out."

They had to be content with that. I think they were already so close to the end that they did not really care. By one and two they left as though already they had wasted too much time away from the wonders that there were in the streets outside. Some of the men still held the weapons on me and others went and brought precious chalas such as the human slaves had worn—shackles, so that I should not escape. They put them on me and Duani laughed.

"Come," said Rhul, "and I will show you the machine."

He led me from the room and up a winding stair. There were tall embrasures and looking through them I discovered that we were in the base of the very high tower with the globe. They must have carried me back to it after Duani had chased me with her laughter and her pebbles. I looked out over the glowing streets, so full of splendor and of silence, and asked Rhul why there were no ghosts inside the tower.

"You have seen the globe with the crystal rods?"

"Yes."

"We are under the shadow of its core. There had to be some retreat for us into reality. Otherwise we would lose the meaning of the dream."

The winding stair went up and up. The chain between my ankles clattered musically. Several times I tripped on it and fell.

"Never mind," Duani said. "You'll grow used to it."

We came at last into a circular room high in the tower. And I stopped and stared.

MOST of the space in that room was occupied by a web of metal girders that supported a great gleaming shaft. The shaft disappeared upward through the roof. It was not tall but very massive, revolving slowly and quietly. There were traps, presumably for access to the offset shaft and the cage that turned it. A ladder led to a trap in the roof.

All the visible metal was sound with only a little surface corrosion. What the alloy was I don't know and when I asked Rhul he only smiled rather sadly. "Knowledge is found," he said, "only to be lost again. Even we of Shandakor forget."

Every bit of that enormous structure had been shaped and polished and fitted into place by hand. Nearly all the Martian peoples work in metal. They seem to have a genius for it and while they are not and apparently never have been mechanical, as some of our races are on Earth, they find many uses for metal that we have never thought of.

But this before me was certainly the high point of the metal-workers' craft. When I saw what was down below, the beautifully simple power plant and the rotary drive set-up with fewer moving parts than I would have thought possible, I was even more respectful. "How old is it?" I asked and again Rhul shook his head.

"Several thousand years ago there is a record of the yearly flooding of the Shadows and it was not the first." He motioned me to follow him up the ladder, bidding Dusan sternly to remain where she was. She came anyway.

There was a raised platform open to the universe and directly above it swung the mighty globe with its crystal rods that gleamed so strangely. Shandakor lay beneath us, a tapestry of many colors, bright and still, and out along the dark sides of the valley the tribesmen waited for the light to die.

"When there is no one left to tend the machine it will stop in time and then the men who have hated us so long will take what they want of Shandakor. Only fear has kept them out this long. The riches of half a world flowed through these streets and much of it remained."

He looked up at the globe. "Yes," he said, "we had knowledge. More, I think, than any other race of Mars."

"But you wouldn't share it with the humans."

Rhul smiled. "Would you give little children weapons to destroy you? We gave men better ploughshares and brighter ornaments and if they invented a machine we did not take it from them. But we did not tempt and burden them with knowledge that was not their own. They were content to make war with sword and spear and so they had more pleasure and less killing and the world was not torn apart."

"And you—how did you make war?"

"We defended our city. The human tribes had nothing that we coveted, so there was no reason to fight them except in self-defense. When we did we won." He paused. "The other non-human races were more stupid or less fortunate. They perished long ago."

HE TURNED again to his explanations of the machine. "It draws its power directly from the sun. Some of the solar energy is converted and stored within the globe to serve as the light-source. Some is sent down to turn the shaft."

"What if it should stop," Dusan said, "while we're still alive?" She shivered, looking out over the beautiful streets.

"It won't—not if the Earthman wishes to live."

"What would I have to gain by stopping it?" I demanded.

"Nothing. And that," said Rhul, "is why I trust you. As long as the globe turns you are safe from the barbarians. After we are gone you will have the pick of the loot of Shandakor."

How I was going to get away with it afterward he did not tell me.

He motioned me down the ladder again but I asked him, "What is the globe, Rhul? How does it make the—the Shadows?"

He frowned. "I can only tell you what has become, I'm afraid, mere traditional knowledge. Our wise men studied deeply into the properties of light. They learned that light has a definite effect upon solid matter and they believed, because of that effect, that stone and metal and crystalline things retain a 'memory' of all

that they have 'seen.' Why this should be I do not know."

I didn't try to explain to him the quantum theory and the photo-electric effect nor the various experiments of Einstein and Millikan and the men who followed them. I didn't know them well enough myself and the old High Martian is deficient in such terminology.

I only said, "The wise men of my world also know that the impact of light tears away tiny particles from the substance it strikes."

I was beginning to get a glimmering of the truth. Light-patterns 'cut' in the electrons of metal and stone—sound-patterns cut in unlikely-looking mediums of plastic, each needing only the proper 'needle' to recreate the recorded melody or the recorded picture.

"They constructed the globe," said Rhul. "I do not know how many generations that required nor how many failures they must have had. But they found at last the invisible light that makes the stones give up their memories."

In other words they had found their needle. What wave-length or combination of wave-lengths in the electromagnetic spectrum flowed out from those crystal rods, there was no way for me to know. But where they probed the walls and the paving blocks of Shandakor they scanned the hidden patterns that were buried in them and brought them forth again in form and color—as the electron needle brings forth whole symphonies from a little ridged disc.

How they had achieved sequence and selectivity was another matter. Rhul said something about the 'memories' having different lengths. Perhaps he meant depth of penetration. The stones of Shandakor were ages old and the outer surfaces would have worn away. The earliest impressions would be gone altogether or at least have become fragmentary and extremely shallow.

Perhaps the scanning beams could differentiate between the overlapping layers of impressions by that fraction

of a micron difference in depth. Photons only penetrate so far into any given substance but if that substance is constantly growing less in thickness the photons would have the effect of going deeper. I imagine the globe was accurate in centuries or numbers of centuries, not in years.

However it was, the Shadows of a golden past walked the streets of Shandakor and the last men of the race waited quietly for death, remembering their glory.

Rhul took me below again and showed me what my tasks would be, chiefly involving a queer sort of lubricant and a careful watch over the power leads. I would have to spend most of my time there but not all of it. During the free periods, Duani might take me where she would.

The old man went away. Duani leaned herself against a girder and studied me with intense interest. "How are you called?" she asked.

"John Ross."

"JonRoss," she repeated and smiled. She began to walk around me, touching my hair, inspecting my arms and chest, taking a child's delight in discovering all the differences there were between herself and what we call a human. And that was the beginning of my captivity.

VI

THERE were days and nights, scant food and scantier water. There was Duani. And there was Shandakor. I lost my fear. And whether I lived to occupy the Chair or not, this was something to have seen.

Duani was my guide. I was tender of my duties because my neck depended on them but there was time to wander in the streets, to watch the crowded pageants that was not and sense the stiffness and the deceleration that were so cruelly real.

I began to get the feel of what this alien culture had been like and how it had dominated half a world without the

need of conquest.

In a Hall of Government, built of white marble and decorated with wall friezes of austere magnificence, I watched the careful choosing and the crowning of a king. I saw the places of learning. I saw the young men trained for war as fully as they were instructed in the arts of peace. I saw the pleasure gardens, the theatres, the forums, the sporting fields—and I saw the places of work, where the men and women of Shandakor coaxed beauty from their looms and forges to trade for the things they wanted from the human world.

The human slaves were brought by their own kind to be sold, and they seemed to be well treated, as one treats a useful animal in which one has invested money. They had their work to do but it was only a small part of the work of the city.

The things that could be had nowhere else on Mars—the tools, the textiles, the fine work in metal and precious stones, the glass and porcelain—were fashioned by the people of Shandakor and they were proud of their skill. Their scientific knowledge they kept entirely to themselves, except what concerned agriculture or medicine or better ways of building drains and houses.

They were the lawgivers, the teachers. And the humans took all they would give and hated them for it. How long it had taken these people to attain such a degree of civilization Danni could not tell me. Neither could old Rhul.

"It is certain that we lived in communities, had a form of civil government, a system of numbers and written speech, before the human tribes. There are traditions of an earlier race than ours, from whom we learned these things. Whether or not this is true I do not know."

In its prime Shandakor had been a vast and flourishing city with countless thousands of inhabitants. Yet I could see no signs of poverty or crime. I couldn't even find a prison.

"Murder was punishable by death,"

said Rhul, "but it was most infrequent. Theft was for slaves. We did not stoop to it." He watched my face, smiling a little acid smile. "That startles you—a great city without suffering or crime or places of punishment."

I had to admit that it did. "Elder race or not, how did you manage to do it? I'm a student of cultures, both here and on my own world. I know all the usual patterns of development and I've read all the theories about them—but Shandakor doesn't fit any of them."

Rhul's smile deepened. "You are human," he said. "Do you wish the truth?"

"Of course."

"Then I will tell you. We developed the faculty of reason."

For a moment I thought he was joking. "Come," I said, "man is a reasoning being—on Earth the only reasoning being."

"I do not know of Earth," he answered courteously. "But on Mars man has always said, 'I reason, I am above the beasts because I reason.' And he has been very proud of himself because he could reason. It is the mark of his humanity. Being convinced that reason operates automatically within him he orders his life and his government upon emotion and superstition."

"He hates and fears and believes, not with reason but because he is told to by other men or by tradition. He does one thing and says another and his reason teaches him no difference between fact and falsehood. His bloodiest wars are fought for the merest whim—and that is why we did not give him weapons. His greatest follies appear to him the highest wisdom, his basest betrayals become noble acts—and that is why we could not teach him justice. We learned to reason. Man only learned to talk."

I understood then why the human tribes had hated the men of Shandakor. I said angrily, "Perhaps that is so on Mars. But only reasoning minds can develop great technologies and we hu-

mans of Earth have outstripped yours a million times. All right, you know or know some things we haven't learned yet, in optics and some branches of electronics and perhaps in metallurgy. But . . ."

I went on to tell him all the things we had that Shandakor did not. "You never went beyond the beast of burden and the simple wheel. We achieved flight long ago. We have conquered space and the planets. We'll go on to conquer the stars!"

Rhul nodded. "Perhaps we were wrong. We remained here and conquered ourselves." He looked out toward the slopes where the barbarian army waited and he sighed. "In the end it is all the same."

DAYS and nights and Duani, bringing me food, sharing her water, asking questions, taking me through the city. The only thing she would not show me was something they called the Place of Sleep. "I shall be there soon enough," she said and shivered.

"How long?" I asked. It was an ugly thing to say.

"We are not told. Rhul watches the level in the cisterns and when it's time . . ." She made a gesture with her hands. "Let us go up on the wall."

We went up among the ghostly soldiery and the phantom banners. Outside there were darkness and death and the coming of death. Inside there were light and beauty, the last proud blaze of Shandakor under the shadow of its doom. There was an eerie magic in it that had begun to tell on me. I watched Duani. She leaned against the parapet, looking outward. The wind ruffled her silver crest, pressed her garments close against her body. Her eyes were full of moonlight and I could not read them. Then I saw that there were tears.

I put my arm around her shoulders. She was only a child, an alien child, not of my race or breed . . .

"JonRoi."

"Yes?"

"There are so many things I will never know."

It was the first time I had touched her. Those curious curls stirred under my fingers, warm and alive. The tips of her pointed ears were soft as a kitten's.

"Duani."

"What?"

"I don't know . . ."

I kissed her. She drew back and gave me a startled look from those black brilliant eyes and suddenly I stopped thinking that she was a child and I forgot that she was not human and—I didn't care.

"Duani, listen. You don't have to go to the Place of Sleep."

She looked at me, her cloak spread out upon the night wind, her hands against my chest.

"There's a whole world out there to live in. And if you aren't happy there I'll take you to my world, to Earth. There isn't any reason why you have to die!"

Still she looked at me and did not speak. In the streets below the silent throngs went by and the towers glowed with many colors. Duani's gaze moved slowly to the darkness beyond the wall, to the barren valley and the hostile rocks.

"No."

"Why not? Because of Rhul, because of all this talk of pride and race?"

"Because of truth. Corin learned it."

I didn't want to think about Corin. "He was alone. You're not. You'd never be alone."

She brought her hands up and laid them on my cheeks very gently. "That green star, that is your world. Suppose it were to vanish and you were the last of all the men of Earth. Suppose you lived with me in Shandakor forever—would you not be alone?"

"It wouldn't matter if I had you."

She shook her head. "It would matter. And our two races are as far apart as the stars. We would have nothing to share with each other."

Remembering what Rhul had told me

I flared up and said some angry things. She let me say them and then she smiled. "It is none of that, JonRoss." She turned to look out over the city. "This is my place and no other. When it is gone I must be gone too."

Quite suddenly I hated Shandakor.

I didn't sleep much after that. Every time Duani left me I was afraid she might never come back. Rhul would tell me nothing and I didn't dare to question him too much. The hours rushed by like seconds and Duani was happy and I was not. My shackles had magnetic locks. I couldn't break them and I couldn't cut the chains.

ONE evening Duani came to me with something in her face and in the way she moved that told me the truth long before I could make her put it into words. She clung to me, not wanting to talk, but at last she said, "Today there was a casting of lots and the first hundred have gone to the Place of Sleep."

"It is the beginning, then."

She nodded. "Every day there will be another hundred until all are gone."

I couldn't stand it any longer. I thrust her away and stood up. "You know where the 'keys' are. Get these chains off me!"

She shook her head. "Let us not quarrel now, JonRoss. Come, I want to walk in the city."

We had quarreled more than once, and fiercely. She would not leave Shandakor and I couldn't take her out by force as long as I was chained. And I was not to be released until everyone but Rhul had entered the Place of Sleep and the last page of that long history had been written.

I walked with her among the dancers and the slaves and the bright-cloaked princes. There were no temples in Shandakor. If they worshipped anything it was beauty and to that their whole city was a shrine. Duani's eyes were rapt and there was a remoteness on her now.

I held her hand and looked at the towers of turquoise and clamsheer, the pavings of rose quartz and marble, the walls of pink and white and deep red coral, and to me they were hideous. The ghostly crowds, the mockery of life, the phantom splendors of the past were hideous, a drug, a snare.

"The faculty of reason!" I thought and saw no reason in any of it.

I looked up to where the great globe turned and turned against the sky, keeping these mockeries alive. "Have you ever seen the city as it is—without the Shadows?"

"No. I think only Rhul, who is the eldest, remembers it that way. I think it must have been very lonely. Even then there were less than three thousand of us left."

It must indeed have been lonely. They must have wanted the Shadows as much to people the empty streets as to fend off the enemies who believed in magic.

I kept looking at the globe. We walked for a long time. And then I said, "I must go back to the tower."

She smiled at me very tenderly. "Soon you will be free of the tower—and of these." She touched the chains. "No, don't be sad, JonRoss. You will remember me and Shandakor as one remembers a dream." She held up her face, that was so lovely and so unlike the meaty faces of human women, and her eyes were full of sombre lights. I kissed her and then I caught her up in my arms and carried her back to the tower.

In that room, where the great shaft turned, I told her, "I have to tend the things below. Go up onto the platform, Duani, where you can see all Shandakor. I'll be with you soon."

I don't know whether she had some hint of what was in my mind or whether it was only the imminence of parting that made her look at me as she did. I thought she was going to speak but she did not, climbing the ladder silently. I watched her slender golden body vanish upward. Then I went into the

chamber below.

There was a heavy metal bar there that was part of a manual control for regulating the rate of turn. I took it off its pin. Then I closed the simple switches on the power plant. I tore out all the leads and smashed the connections with the bar. I did what damage I could to the cogs and the offset shaft. I worked very fast. Then I went up into the main chamber again. The great shaft was still turning but slowly, ever more slowly.

There was a cry from above me and I saw Duani. I sprang up the ladder, thrusting her back onto the platform. The globe moved heavily of its own momentum. Soon it would stop but the white fires still flickered in the crystal rods. I climbed up onto the railing, clinging to a strut. The chains on my wrists and ankles made it hard but I could reach. Duani tried to pull me down. I think she was screaming. I hung on and smashed the crystal rods with the bar, as many as I could.

There was no more motion, no more light. I got down on the platform again and dropped the bar. Duani had forgotten me. She was looking at the city.

The lights of many colors that had burned there were burning still but they were old and dim, cold embers without radiance. The towers of jade and turquoise rose up against the little moons and they were broken and cracked with time and there was no glory in them. They were desolate and very sad. The night lay dotted around their feet. The streets, the plazas and the market squares were empty, their marble paving blank and bare. The soldiers had gone from the walls of Shandakor, with their banners and their bright mail, and there was no longer any movement anywhere within the gates.

DUANI let out one small voiceless cry. And as though in answer to it, suddenly from the darkness of the valley and the slopes beyond there rose

a thin force howling as of wolves.

"Why?" she whispered. "Why?" She turned to me. Her face was pitiful. I caught her to me.

"I couldn't let you die! Not for dreams and visions, nothing. Look. Duani. Look at Shandakor." I wanted to force her to understand. "Shandakor is broken and ugly and forlorn. It is a dead city—but you're alive. There are many cities but only one life for you."

Still she looked at me and it was hard to meet her eyes. She said, "We knew all that, JonBess."

"Duani, you're a child, you've only a child's way of thought. Forget the past and think of tomorrow. We can get through the barbarians. Corin did. And after that . . ."

"And after that you would still be human—and I would not."

From below us in the dim and empty streets there came a sound of lamentation. I tried to hold her but she slipped out from between my hands. "And I am glad that you are human," she whispered. "You will never understand what you have done."

And she was gone before I could stop her, down into the tower.

I went after her. Down the endless winding stairs with my chains clattering between my feet, out into the streets, the dark and broken and deserted streets of Shandakor. I called her name and her golden body went before me, fleet and slender, distant and more distant. The chains dragged upon my feet and the night took her away from me.

I stopped. The whelming silence rushed smoothly over me and I was bitterly afraid of this dark dead Shandakor that I did not know. I called again to Duani and then I began to search for her in the shattered shadowed streets. I know now how long it must have been before I found her.

For when I found her, she was with the others. The last people of Shandakor, the men and the women, the women first, were walking silently in a long line toward a low flat-roofed

bedding that I knew without telling was the Place of Sleep.

They were going to die and there was no pride in their faces now. There was a sickness in them, a sickness and a hurt in their eyes as they moved heavily forward, not looking, not wanting to look at the sordid ancient streets that I had stripped of glory.

"Duan!" I called, and ran forward but she did not turn in her place in the line. And I saw that she was weeping.

Rhul turned toward me, and his look had a weary contempt that was bitterer than a curse. "Of what use, after all, to kill you now?"

"But I did this thing! I did it!"

"You are only human."

The long line shuffled on and Duan's little feet were closer to that final doorway. Rhul looked upward at the sky. "There is still time before the sunrise. The women at least will be spared the indignity of spears."

"Let me go with her!"

I tried to follow her, to take my place in line. And the weapon in Rhul's hand moved and there was the pain and I lay as Corin had lain while they went silently on into the Place of Sleep.

The barbarians found me when they came, still half doubtful, into the city star down. I think they were afraid of me. I think they feared me as a wizard who had somehow destroyed all the folk of Shandakor.

For they broke my chains and healed my wounds and later they even gave me out of the loot of Shandakor the only thing I wanted—a bit of porcelain, shaped like the head of a young girl.

I sit in the Chair that I craved at the University and my name is written on the roll of the discoverers. I am eminent, I am respectable—I, who murdered the glory of a race.

Why didn't I go after Duan into the Place of Sleep? I could have executed! I could have dragged myself across those stones. And I wish to God I had. I wish that I had died with Shandakor!

for EXCITEMENT and SUSPENSE!!

VAMPIRES OF VENUS

by KARL MANNHEIM

★

IT'S LONELY ON THE SIDEWALK

by DALE BOGARD

★

FAST TRAIN TO TERROR

by DAVID BOYCE

★

NOBODY DIED FOR JOHNNY

by DALE BOGARD

★

CANARIES SOMETIMES CROAK

by JOHN COOPER

★

LET THE DEAD SLEEP ON

by DALE BOGARD

★

NO PROFIT ON MURDER

by CARL JOHNSON

In the MASTER THRILLER SERIES

1/6 at your bookstore

If possible write to the publishers:
WORLD CIRCULARS ONE LTD., London LTD
CAPTAIN'S HOUSE, TUNBRIDGE WELLS
KENT ENGLAND 4, enclosing 1/6 per copy or 1/4,
plus postage

KILL TOBACCO CRAVING

IN A FEW HOURS without "Will Power"



Why ruin your health destroying your digestion, wrecking your nerves and continue wasting money? Clear system of every trace of Tobacco poison. Get back strong nerves, renewed Vital Power.

VICTOR TREATMENT has freed thousands of Tobacco addicts from the Tobacco Habit, and makes it easy—**EVEN FOR THE HEAVIEST, LIFE-LONG SMOKER** (whether you smoke, Cigarettes, Pipe, Cigars or take sniff). **3d. (stamp)** brings **BOOK - PERMANENT RELEASE FROM TOBACCO**—showing how you can end Tobacco addiction for good—**SCIENTIFICALLY**. Sent in plain wrapper. **POST FREE.**

WRITE TO-DAY.

CONCLUSIVE PROOF!!!

Bristol.

Dear Sir,—Many thanks for your help and wonderful cure for smoking. I not only feel better but am enjoying my food which before your help was a second thought. Thinking you again. *G. Wyatt.*

Warrimoo.

Dear Sir,—I am writing to you for another treatment for the Smoking Habit. Will you please send me treatment for my brother who smokes forty to fifty cigarettes a day and sometimes more. You may like to know how my sister and my friend and myself are going on, we have not touched a cigarette or any sort since we received your wonderful remedy. Thinking you once again for helping us to get rid of a very nasty habit. *C. R. Meyell.*

Redditch.

Dear Sir,—It is just about twelve months now since I took your treatment, and I can honestly say I have not craved for a smoke since, as your treatment is really good and I have recommended your treatment to many of my friends and they are really amazed. So now I have two friends that have asked me to get the treatment for them, as they want to refrain from smoking after Christmas. *H. Rogers.*

London.

Dear Sir,—I wish to thank you very much for a most gratifying result. All I can say is that smoking does not now worry me, and you may certainly use this as you please. *J. W. Elton.*

Leamington.

Dear Sir,—It is now over two years since I took your remedy for removing the Tobacco Habit, and am now happy to say that tobacco in any form is not in viewable to my the least. I am ten times better in health and put on over a stone in weight. Thank you very much for everything. Now I want to mention my friend and workmate of your previous cure for the Tobacco Habit. Please send him details, he is a heavy cigarette smoker and it is costing his health more each day. As a further testimonial to your cure, I would like to see him take the Victor Treatment, I know what the result will be. *A. Spragg.*

£1,000 will be forwarded to any charitable Institute if the originals of these cannot be produced at any time with thousands of others at our office.

**VICTOR INSTITUTE (PMB 54)
VICTOR HOUSE, LAWSON ROAD, COLWYTH BAY, NORTH WALES
(Established 1904)**



THE INTRUDER

By OLIVER SAARI

THE first thing Baldwin felt was the cool pressure of the ambulator cane against his face. Sluggishly his thoughts unwound from a soft, sticky darkness. He'd been asleep — no! — he'd been drugged! He breathed deeply

and let the sweet-smelling antidote fill his lungs.

Images solidified: first the pretty face of the stewardess, then the room. A private room, of course, for him . . . Memory returned, and with it a con-

To have an exact duplicate of yourself show up and take over your business, your wife? . . . brother, it's murder!

cleanness of regret. Regret that the Ultrabeam Jump was sensually so unpleasant as to make anesthesia necessary. There was a certain loss of dignity in being doped and bundled about like a piece of luggage . . . Still, a day's dragged sleep was a small price to pay for spanning the gulf between the stars.

"You should lie down and rest awhile, Sir," said the stewardess.

Noting a nervous, hesitant quality to her voice, Baldwin looked at her more attentively. What was there in her manner that made him uneasy? She seemed too scared, too unsure of herself . . .

He was not on the ship.

The realization brought all his senses into sudden focus. This luxurious room was not the cramped cabin of an Ultrabeam transport. It was more like the room he'd had at the Alpha Centauri Station, but not the same one. His luggage was piled neatly in the corner.

"Why was I moved?"

"Mr. Carmody's orders, sir."

"Mr. Carmody's orders!" repeated Baldwin in astonishment. "Who does he think he —"

He bit off the words as the girl opened a door and dodged past a blue-uniformed guard who stood squarely in the opening. A golden sunburst on the broad chest was marked *Baldwin Transstellar Special Police*, and the uniform cap said *Koler Station*. Baldwin knew, then, that he'd made the Jump and arrived at his destination. Carmody must have had him moved off the ship like any third-class passenger! Why?

The guard stood a head taller than Baldwin, barring his way. "Sorry, sir, you can't go through just now."

"Look here! I'm T. J. Baldwin. I own this place. I can fire you and who ever gave the stupid order you're following."

"Wait, please, sir—"

The uniformed man was nervous but unyielding.

BALDWIN tried to push past the guard, but was stopped effectively. He felt a sudden pang of fear and an accelerating of his heart. What could have gone wrong? His last feeling before anesthesia on the transport had been one of well-being, a memory of accomplished objectives. The local government had wanted Transstellar to move its Centauri Station a billion miles farther out. They'd claimed that Proxima, the third sun of their system, was moving too close to the beam and making operation dangerous. Baldwin had gone to fight the order and he'd licked it, saving the company millions. There had been a few short cuts in his victory, of course, but nothing that could lead to his legitimate arrest. Why, then, was he being held prisoner in this room?

"I wish to see Commander Carmody," he said very coldly, stepping back.

The guard was spared from answering by the hurried appearance of a beefy, perspiring man in platinum-banded uniform.

The newcomer stopped just inside the room, the folds in his chain deepening as he saw Baldwin.

"You're up! I told them not to wake you."

"You—Carmody," snapped Baldwin. "Tell this idiot to move his muscles out of my way. Tell him who I am."

"I don't know who you are," said Carmody in a peculiar tone.

Baldwin stared at him. He knew now that something was really wrong, that the Commander was playing a game with roots in something deep. Perhaps someone higher up was involved . . . The thought made him blanch.

"I don't know who you are," repeated Carmody, his brow squeezing out beads of perspiration. "We'd better go to my office and talk."

"You don't have any office," snapped Baldwin, thoroughly angry now. "You're through, Carmody! I don't care if you are my cousin!"

"Come on," said the Commander

wearily, taking his arm. "Let's go talk it over. If I'm crazy I'll admit it."

SOMEWHAT calmed, Baldwin followed the other through the door. The corridor led to a promenade which faced the main waiting room of the Station. The place had an air of vastness Baldwin had always liked. The iridescent sky was painted on metal, and the trees and buildings hid strengthening beams and stanchions, but the illusion of planetary conditions was good.

There was excitement on the floor, an unnatural flux. People who should have been hurrying about were gathered in small knots, talking and gesticulating. Others swarmed around the information enclosure, jostling and squeezing. Baldwin was bursting with impatience by the time they reached the Commander's office.

"All right, Carmody. I want to know what this is all about. You've still got a chance if you can talk fast—"

"Wait, before you say anything more," the Commander interrupted. There was a note of pleading in his voice. "Something's happened. An accident. You are Baldwin, aren't you?"

"You know I am!"

"All right, I believe you. But so was the other one!"

"Other one?"

"You just came from Centauri, didn't you? On the six-twenty?"

"You should know! You had me moved off the ship!"

Carmody took a deep breath, obviously stalling for time.

"I'll give it to you the way I see it," he said finally. "The six-twenty came in the first time more than four hours ago. You were on board that ship too."

Baldwin sank into a chair, his mind cold, clear, and racing. He thought of several possible explanations for Carmody's statement, and discarded them one by one. The only answer that made any sense was that the Commander was crazy.

"I know how it sounds," said Carmody sullenly. "I know what you're thinking. But I tell you there was another six-twenty, and you were on it. I shook your hand. I put you on the shuttle boat. I watched it take off and head for Earth."

Baldwin jumped to his feet and slammed the palm of his hand on Carmody's desk, hard. "I don't know what you're trying to pull. But I think I'll fire you just for not being able to think of a better story!"

"Something happened in the Ultra-beam," insisted Carmody, jabbing at an intercom button. "I'm having my technicians look into it now."

"But there was no other ship! Why don't you check with the Centauri Station?"

"I'm checking," said Carmody wearily, peaching the intercom again. "You know it takes two days to get an answer back. All we know is two ships came in and you were on the second one."

THE intercom was still silent, but a small, thin man came running into the room. On seeing Baldwin he came to an abrupt halt, jaw hanging.

"Well, Nelson" snapped Carmody.

"She's the six-twenty all right, Chief," the man said excitedly. "We compared her with the first one, and they're like two castings from the same mold. Even the same specks of dust!"

"But where in blazes did the second one come from?" demanded Carmody.

"There's been some uneasiness about Proxima Centauri moving too close to our transmission line. You know how the Ultra-beam's unstable in a strong gravity field—that's why the Stations are built so far out—"

"Tell me, man—what happened?" bel-lowed Carmody, banging the desk with his fist.

"We think Proxima's field split the beam in two! Something like a double-refracting crystal splits ordinary light.

Lucky for us one phase lagged the other one by four hours, or there would have been one helluva bang in the receivers!"

"Are you trying to tell me the second ship came out of *working*?"

"The mass-energy must have come from Proxima herself. It's been a known theoretical possibility . . ."

Baldwin listened to the discourse in stunned silence. Disbelief gave way to a growing horror. His personal advisers had assured him Proxima would not disturb the beam. If this accident had actually happened, heads would roll.

"Then there's no possibility of—of—a trick?" he heard Carmody say. "The ships are identical? You've checked on the—uh—doubles?"

"I'm having a pair of them sent here now," said the technician. "They're absolutely alike: fingerprints, cardiographs, cephalographs, credentials—everything."

Baldwin struggled between alternatives of disbelief and fear. He sat without saying a word or moving a muscle until a guard ushered in two men.

They were like two prints from the same negative, with the identical expressions of terror on their well-fed faces. Their lower lips trembled in the same way, and they were nervously wringing their pudgy hands. They didn't seem to want to look at one another.

Baldwin was conscious of his own dry-throated voice saying, "I'm T. J. Baldwin. There's been an accident."

"I—I've been told," said the two simultaneously. "I'd like to get home as soon as possible, sir. My wife—"

The two mouths stopped moving at the same instant. The two faces turned to one another and blanched.

Baldwin buried his head in his hands and shuddered.

"Take them away . . . Take them away," he muttered.

After the two had gone, there was silence in the office. For a full five min-

utes Baldwin could hear only the rasp of his own breathing. Little by little the conviction of truth settled down on him. Then there must be another T. J. Baldwin, another *he*, out there in space somewhere. That other one was going home.

"What do you think I should do, Mr. Baldwin?" asked Carmody finally.

"Get me a ship," said Baldwin weakly. "I want to go home."

THE office building looked as though Baldwin Transstellar were trying to reach the stairs by piling concrete on steel. As Baldwin stared down the two-thousand-foot side of it from the window of the landing airtaxi, he felt jumpy and nervous, strangely unsure of himself.

His office was on the top floor and had a private entrance. He walked over to it on butterfly knees, feeling somehow like an intruder as he entered the thick-carpeted corridor. The relief he'd needed and expected didn't come. His nerves cried for release, and yet every step wound him tighter and tighter.

The massive door of his office was locked. Baldwin placed a trembling hand on the scanner key and the door opened softly. The man sitting behind the desk looked up, startled.

That man was T. J. Baldwin.

The shock was somehow even deeper than Baldwin had expected. Up to then he hadn't really believed that another *he* existed. He would have been relieved to find out he'd been tricked, no matter what the subterfuge implied. But here before him sat the objective reality—his own mirror image, solid as life. His mind tried to believe his senses . . .

They looked at each other for a minute in silence, studying each other's features in an agony of interest.

"Glad to see you," said the man behind the desk finally. "Sit down."

Why didn't I say that? Why don't this man and I talk together like those

doubled idly back at the Station?

The observation gave him comfort. Complete and absolute duplication of identity was a horrible thing. Perhaps, after all, there was a difference.

"I suppose we should call each other something," said the man behind the desk. "How about 'Number One' and 'Number Two'?"

"You are 'Number One', I presume," said Baldwin.

The other shrugged with an exaggerated indifference that somewhat irritated. The desk intercom chose that moment to tinkle discreetly. "Mr. Armbruster would like to see you, sir," said the voice of a secretary.

The man behind the desk made a gesture, and after a moment the tall, lanky head of Transstellor's Legal Department stalked in. On seeing the two Baldwins he stepped in mid-stride.

"Do your gawking later," said Number One acidly. "I want to know how Transstellor stands on this thing."

Armbruster's jaw closed with a snap. His face had paled at first; now it colored. His eyes darted from one to the other, resting finally on the man behind the desk.

"Not well," he said. "We're responsible—there's no way out of that. The only question is, how much will it cost? I'm having my men run the data into our legal analyzer now, to get a prediction."

"But can the other passengers sue?" insisted Number One. "The originals haven't been harmed in any way—I should know that! Do the—uh—duplicates have any legal rights? Are they actually *people*?"

Baldwin jumped up from his chair. Crystal clear, he knew the thought behind that question.

"There'll be no discrimination against the duplicates!"

"That's right," said Armbruster, his eyes shifting rapidly. "I've already got a partial result from our analyzer, and the prediction is that the doubles will

have equal rights."

"Then we're in trouble," said Number One grimly.

"Yes," agreed the lawyer. "There will be questions of property rights, legal responsibilities—of identity itself."

"Then we've got to settle with every one of them," said Baldwin. "Out of court, and fast! Before they start really feeling their losses."

"You're working on them?" said Number One.

"Yes," said the lawyer. "But it's no use having them sign anything till their legal status is established. The Supreme Analyzer in Washington should come through with a decision sometime today."

"Then get the machinery moving!" snapped Number One. "Soon as the Supreme Analyzer's decision comes in, report directly to me."

AFTER Armbruster had gone, Baldwin spent five minutes carefully avoiding the eyes of Number One. He felt sick, collapsed inside. For the first time, he was on the outside looking in. Another man had taken over his life.

A chair squeaked. Number One had turned to stare out of the window, his face immobile in profile. It was the face of a stranger. Baldwin tried, but could not think of it as his own. An oppressive tension filled the room like a stifling mist.

"Have you seen Lily?" asked Baldwin finally.

"I called her up. I told her it was a hoax and she shouldn't pay attention to any rumors. She said, 'Golly, that makes me a bigamist, doesn't it?'"

Just his Lily, thought Baldwin . . . Sometimes she doesn't think deeply. He asked for her, all over. He wanted to put his head on her shoulder and have her stroke his hair.

"She must know it's true by now," he said. "Shouldn't one of us go see her?"

Number One leaned back and closed his eyes. Baldwin knew what he was

thinking. They had a wife of only three months — young and pretty, but only one!

"How about you?" said Number One, bringing the tips of his fingers together slowly. "Why don't you go over? I can stay here at the office and handle things."

Baldwin laughed a hard, bitter laugh like the bark of a dog. He understood perfectly. A wife was only a wife, but this office was the control center of Baldwin Transstellar — the throne room of an empire! It was not an even trade!

"No," he said coldly. "We'll stay together until the legal mess is straightened out."

"As you wish," said Number One. "Armbruster should be coming through with a complete prediction any minute. Then we'll know what to expect."

"You realize," said Baldwin carefully, "that any decision of the Supreme Analyzer applies also to us."

"Of course. But we can work that out later."

At that moment Armbruster came in. His thin face wore a look of relief.

"It's what we wanted — what we had to have," he exulted.

"Well?" snapped Baldwin, feeling irritation when he realized Number One had spoken the same word, perfectly synchronized.

"Each of the doubles will be non-legal entities as far as possible, until some means of permanently telling them apart is established. There'll be a time-limit, of course — maybe a couple of days."

"What happens after the time-limit?" asked Number One.

"Nothing, if the doubles get together before then and get themselves legally identified. They'll have to agree on some division of assets and responsibilities, of course."

"And if they don't?" prompted Baldwin.

"They'll be identified somehow and

declared separate legal entities. They'll be able to sue one another — and us!"

"After only two days!" cried Number One, jumping up. "Armbruster, you're an idiot! That isn't enough time to reach any agreements!"

"I can't dictate to the Analyzer," said Armbruster wearily. "I can only ask for a ruling. Besides, nothing can be done until the doubles can be legally told apart. That time-limit may be the thing that will save us."

"How?"

"This whole thing has to go through fast! If just one of those doubles realizes the power he has over us, before we get him bought off, we're in real trouble."

"What power, Armbruster?" prompted Baldwin.

"Well —" the lawyer had the manner of a man walking on blistered feet. "Every one of the passengers had suffered a very personal loss due to the accident. A loss of identity. If one of them enters a suit against us on that angle, I think the Analyzer will throw the case to a human court. I entered the data in our own analyzer, and the decision was 'Indeterminate'."

"Indeterminate?"

Armbruster nodded, his face pale. "You know what that means."

Baldwin knew, and the knowledge made him ill. There was a deep-running popular feeling that the Ullasheem Transport system should belong to the public. Any one of the forty-two possible lawsuits, if thrown to a human court, could break the company!

"All right, we'll settle," said Number One grimly.

"How much can I offer?"

"Up to a million apiece," said Number One. "If that fails, there are other measures."

"Other measures," echoed Baldwin softly.

LILY'S voice over the phone was just as he remembered it.

"Both of you are coming home?" she said, a faint edge perceptible in the sugar of her voice. "That'll be just *twice* as nice, won't it?"

"Yes, darling," said Baldwin. "I wanted to prepare you for the shock. It is quite a shock, believe me. But the three of us have to get together before—"

"Before we become laughing stocks, that's what!" cried Lily, and now the edge was definitely there, cutting freely. "A million people have been here today, and they're all laughing at us—at us—"

"There, there," soothed Baldwin. "After all, it isn't as though you'd lost me, is it?"

"Lost you! I don't care if—"

"Darling, I haven't time to talk now," Baldwin cut in. "I'll see you in a half an hour."

The phone clicked dead. Baldwin kept his face expressionless, because Number One was looking at him.

"What did she say?"

"She's mad. You know Lily."

Darkness had fallen by the time they took off in the sleek, chauffeur-driven car. As Baldwin watched the shifting, varicolored lights of the city fade in the distance, he felt utterly homeless and lonely. The half-hour ride home was a period of strained silence, with each man sunk deep in his own thoughts.

Lily was waiting at the door, dressed in a sheer, revealing gown with diamond garters. She'd been crying, though her eyes were dry now.

"No—oh, no!" she gasped as she saw them.

Her eyes dilated, then closed, and she swayed on her feet. Baldwin felt an impulse to go to her, to comfort her and whisper something reassuring into her ear. But he was an instant too late, because Number One was there exactly as he would have been. The sight of the two together staggered him. It occurred to him that little by little the other was moving into sole possession of their common identity.

Where would it stop?

If he were no longer T. J. Baldwin, who would he be? His mind would not support such a hypothesis, even for an instant. He was T. J. Baldwin; he always had been and always would be. Number One was the intruder, the unknown.

He looked on coldly as Lily sobbed tearlessly on the shoulder of Number One. They looked ridiculous together, somehow—an old rake with a young chorus-girl wife that he'd bought. An expensive, jeweled thing. He wondered if she were really crying, or just acting as she sometimes did.

"Break it up!" he said harshly.

They looked up at him as at a stranger. But Baldwin looked only at Lily. There was no sympathy for him in her face, only confusion and fear for herself. And disbelief. Her limited imagination could not cope with the facts.

"I forget you hadn't met," said Number One blandly. "Lily, I want you to meet your other husband."

A tremendous weariness weighed down on Baldwin. He felt the shivering up of something within him. He no longer desired anything but a lonely place and sleep.

"All right," he said finally. "Make fools of yourselves if you want to. I'm going to bed."

BALDWIN awoke, not knowing exactly where. He was in bed in a large room equipped with every comfort. After awhile he recognized it as a guest room in his own house.

A hasty glance at the ceiling clock told him he'd slept late. A double dose of sedative had given him a night of troubled sleep, punctuated by nightmares.

He was an unwanted guest in his own house. Another man had occupied his bed.

The thought hammered at him until he forced it into the background by a sheer effort of will. Listlessly he dialed

breakfast on the robot waiter, then sat back against the pillows to think. After a completely wasted half hour, he picked up the phone and got a private connection with Armbruster.

"I meant to call you," said the lawyer in a low voice. "Have you heard it on the videos?"

"Heard what?"

"The Supreme Analyzer's decision! Our prediction was close."

"Hm-m—so there's a time-limit on the identification?"

"It's shorter than we expected. The deadline for the voluntary action is midnight tonight!"

"Tonight! Will that be enough time?"

"I've got half the passengers ready to sign off now. We're doubling their assets before the accident and adding a hundred thousand bonus. The others should come around."

"How about my—uh—the other one? Is he there at the office now?"

"Yes, sir," said Armbruster, almost in a whisper.

"Is it true that neither of us can make a move, legally?"

"As far as the law is concerned, you two don't exist until midnight tonight. You're supposed to report to the local court for identification—"

"Then we have to work through proxies of the Company? Through you, Armbruster?"

"Yes, sir—until—"

"All right, then. Permit no action on the part of the other one. Understand? Settle with the other passengers as soon as you can, but accept no orders from him."

Armbruster made a choking sound. Immediately afterward, Baldwin heard the faint tinkle of an intercom at the other end, and hung up. At that moment he felt almost as sorry for Armbruster as for himself.

He leaned back against the pillows, closed his eyes and tried to think.

Should he go to the office, meet Number One, and report for legal separation

of identity? No. That seemed wrong, somehow. It didn't solve anything.

Should he go downstairs and see Lily? A coldness settled over him at the thought. He felt a complete lack of desire for her.

Why leave the room at all, then? In it he was safe and self-sufficient for the time being. And he needed rest. He could lock the door from his bedside; no one could disturb him . . . Somewhat calmed by this thought, he rolled over and tried to sleep again.

BUT sleep would not come . . . Midnight tonight, Armbruster had said . . . It was easy to see why the time had been made so short: there was no enforceable human law that covered absolutely identical persons; therefore the separation of the doubles had to be effected immediately. Baldwin saw the justice of it in every case except his own—after all, wasn't Transsteller making good the losses of the others?

Almost on a subconscious level his thoughts worked toward a disturbing but inevitable conclusion . . . Transsteller was compensating the other victims of the accident by doubling their assets.

But he was Transsteller. Who would compensate *him*?

With a grim certainty Baldwin knew that joint-ownership of the Company with his double was impossible. There was no such thing as accepting the loss of one's possessions, the setback of all one's life's aims, without a struggle. The only acceptable solution was winner take all.

Yet, how could he possibly win? By what trick, legal or otherwise, could he obtain undisputed possession of his own property, a right to live his own life? In this game the loser would always have a countermove, for he would then be the victim of uncompensated losses and confusion! It was an insoluble stalemate, unless—

He was suddenly wide awake, shivering. A very disturbing possibility be-

gun to eat its way into his brain. An unpleasant thought, involving a nauseating self-revelation. His mind recoiled at it, but he couldn't ignore it.

He looked about the room with new eyes now. It was still a refuge, but not an impregnable one. The window faced open air; a locked door could be forced . . . Hurriedly he got up and started dressing.

The house was silent, and he met no one on his way to the basement level. This was the crucial step. If he were first, if he hadn't been anticipated, he had a good chance!

The door of the gun-room opened silently under his hand, revealing the rows of sleek hunting rifles he'd saved from younger days. Neatly stacked on the shelves were sealed cases of ammunition.

He closed the door and started breaking the guns, trying to make as little noise as possible. When the once-treasured weapons were twisted and scattered, he took the one he'd set aside and filled its magazine with clean, oily-smelling cartridges. Only then did the frantic haste of his motions abate.

So far the odds were with him!

His exultation was short-lived when he realized that Number One would *have* he'd do this . . . It was like a problem in infinite regresses, like the diminishing images in a hall of mirrors. Each of them could guess the other's probable course of action, and could modify his own plans accordingly. The main question was, where to stop modifying and when to act?

BACK in the locked sanctuary of the guest room, he put the gun within easy reach and sat down to wait. The inaction went against his nature. But the first move had to come from outside—the cards were laid out that way.

He felt safer now, able to think more clearly . . . He'd always been able to solve his problems with cold, ruthless logic. It had been his ruthlessness as

much as his skill at financial manipulations that had enabled him to run a small inherited fortune up to a controlling interest in the Transstellar Corporation . . . All that seemed long ago and far away now.

But it explained why he, T. J. Baldwin, was sitting here in a locked room with a loaded gun!

Daylight deepened into dusk, and still he waited. His head ached with a pounding agony; his stomach howled its hunger—for food that he could obtain at the touch of a button, but which he didn't dare eat! A hundred times he regretted having decided to wait, but it was the only course left to him now . . .

At seven-thirty Lily called him. She sounded frightened.

"What are you doing up there?"

"Who told you to ask?"

"He—he hasn't come home yet. I can't reach him at the office, I—"

"You can tell him I'm going out now!" said Baldwin harshly, and hung up.

Was it a trick? Had someone put her up to calling him, to make sure he was there?

He was certain of only one thing: he had to get out of that room!

Cold sweat beaded on his forehead, and the heavy gun stuck clannily to his palms as he opened the door. The hallway was brightly lighted and empty. It took all the strength he could muster in his legs to advance into it. There were four other rooms opening onto the hall, and an elevator as well as two staircases. Baldwin found the switch that darkened the corridor, then went soundlessly to a window at one end. He leaned against the cold glass, shivering.

The sky was overcast, reflecting redly the lights of the city in the distance. Air traffic moved like swarms of sparks as commuters drove homeward from the city. On the shadowy lawn below, nothing moved.

Ten-thirty! The luminous dial of

Baldwin's watch stared mockingly at him in the darkness. Why was nothing happening? The insect was sapping his strength, leaving him helpless. Yet he had to wait. The other must know that midnight was too late for both of them . . .

It was past eleven when he heard the sound, a soft rushing as of bat wings beating in the darkness. An air-car!

THERE were no lights, but the sound came nearer from above and faded out on the other side of the house. Cursing himself for a fool, Baldwin ran to the window at the other end of the corridor. There he could see the metallic gleam of the car on the lawn below, but nothing else. He fought back an impulse to fire blindly into the shadows.

What now? He'd been outguessed once—he should have known the air-car wouldn't come in the usual way. A dozen ways in which he could be trapped suddenly occurred to him.

The decision to act gave him new strength. His mind worked rapidly, trying to probe the end of the infinite regress, to anticipate the next move . . .

He was halfway down a service stairway, moving cautiously in the pitch darkness, when he heard the gentle opening and closing of a door below him.

He stood frozen to the spot, making no sound. The man at the bottom of the stair had a gun. There was no doubting the identity of their conclusions now. The same mental process had brought them to the same spot in time and space.

Only, this time he was first!

Tensely he waited. The darkness was impenetrable, but the cautious footsteps came nearer . . . He could almost feel the warmth of the other's body when he fired.

The flash of the gun disclosed the other's startled face; the gunshot was like a snarl of rage. Baldwin held the

trigger back for continuous firing until the figure before him melted away. He followed its clumping progress down the stairs, firing until the gun was empty.

He stood resting for awhile in the darkness. Then, somehow, his hand found the light switch, and the soft, opalescent glow came on without a sound.

A trail of blood on the stair led his eyes to a crumpled figure at the bottom. Already the body was cooling in death, the open-eyed face staring upward . . .

Baldwin's face.

For an interminable time he stood there. Something inside him twisted and writhed and finally solidified; and then he began to cringe.

It was his own face in death . . . That pitiful heap at the bottom of the stair was he.

What his mind had refused to believe while the other was an active enemy to be fought, it now accepted in a flood. The brain behind that death-mask had carried his ideas, his aspirations. His own life, too, could end like this and would look like this to an outsider.

His heart pounded against his ribs as if trying to add its contents to the widening pool at his feet. With a superhuman effort he tore himself loose from the incredible fascination of the thing on the floor. He was only vaguely conscious of other people about, of screams . . . He ran out onto the cool grass of the lawn, stumbled and fell, and didn't have the strength to rise again.

Sometimes later the police found him there, talking to himself in the darkness.

"COLD-BLOODED murder!" the voices boomed. "This man so hated and feared his own motives that he committed murder rather than face himself! Was ever a crime so clearly premeditated — so deserving of punishment!"

Baldwin woke with a start, and knew

he had been drowning again. His body was stiff, the bedclothes soaked with perspiration.

He was in his own bed again. The doctors had told him he was all right. Lily had cried over him and stroked his hair, sobbing, "Poor dear, poor dear." Even the police guard outside his door had bowed unobtrusive respect.

There was no doubt about it; he was once more the one and only T. J. Baldwin.

He pronounced the name to himself with a spasm of self-loathing. If only he could be rid of the nightmare! The accusing voice that spoke out of a dead face that was like his own . . .

Fighting an overwhelming weariness, he rolled over in bed and pushed the buzzer. Armsbaster came in almost immediately; he had been waiting outside the door for over an hour.

Category	All respondents	Those who have been in the U.S. for 10 years or more	Those who have been in the U.S. for less than 10 years
U.S. born	~75%	~75%	~75%
U.S. born and foreign born	~15%	~15%	~15%
Foreign born	~10%	~10%	~10%

"I couldn't do anything," said the pale-faced lawyer. "You're going to be indicted for murder!"

"But the time-limit wasn't up! You said that legally the two of us didn't exist—"

"Unless certain measures were taken," Armbruster said wearily. "Well, he took them . . . He went and got himself identified!"

BALDWIN closed his eyes. Of course! That was what he would have done in the other's place, if he had thought of it . . . Suddenly he could see how it had happened.

"You talked him into it, Ambrose."

477 478 479 480 481 482 483 484 485 486 487 488 489 490 491 492 493 494 495 496 497 498 499 500 501 502 503 504 505 506 507 508 509 510 511 512 513 514 515 516 517 518 519 520 521 522 523 524 525 526 527 528 529 530 531 532 533 534 535 536 537 538 539 540 541 542 543 544 545 546 547 548 549 550 551 552 553 554 555 556 557 558 559 560 561 562 563 564 565 566 567 568 569 570 571 572 573 574 575 576 577 578 579 580 581 582 583 584 585 586 587 588 589 590 591 592 593 594 595 596 597 598 599 600 601 602 603 604 605 606 607 608 609 610 611 612 613 614 615 616 617 618 619 620 621 622 623 624 625 626 627 628 629 630 631 632 633 634 635 636 637 638 639 640 641 642 643 644 645 646 647 648 649 650 651 652 653 654 655 656 657 658 659 660 661 662 663 664 665 666 667 668 669 670 671 672 673 674 675 676 677 678 679 680 681 682 683 684 685 686 687 688 689 690 691 692 693 694 695 696 697 698 699 700 701 702 703 704 705 706 707 708 709 710 711 712 713 714 715 716 717 718 719 720 721 722 723 724 725 726 727 728 729 730 731 732 733 734 735 736 737 738 739 740 741 742 743 744 745 746 747 748 749 750 751 752 753 754 755 756 757 758 759 760 761 762 763 764 765 766 767 768 769 770 771 772 773 774 775 776 777 778 779 780 781 782 783 784 785 786 787 788 789 790 791 792 793 794 795 796 797 798 799 800 801 802 803 804 805 806 807 808 809 810 811 812 813 814 815 816 817 818 819 820 821 822 823 824 825 826 827 828 829 830 831 832 833 834 835 836 837 838 839 840 841 842 843 844 845 846 847 848 849 850 851 852 853 854 855 856 857 858 859 860 861 862 863 864 865 866 867 868 869 870 871 872 873 874 875 876 877 878 879 880 881 882 883 884 885 886 887 888 889 890 891 892 893 894 895 896 897 898 899 900 901 902 903 904 905 906 907 908 909 910 911 912 913 914 915 916 917 918 919 920 921 922 923 924 925 926 927 928 929 930 931 932 933 934 935 936 937 938 939 940 941 942 943 944 945 946 947 948 949 950 951 952 953 954 955 956 957 958 959 960 961 962 963 964 965 966 967 968 969 970 971 972 973 974 975 976 977 978 979 980 981 982 983 984 985 986 987 988 989 990 991 992 993 994 995 996 997 998 999 1000

"All right," said Baldwin, sighing almost with relief at his decision. "Go away."

^a Bond angle between C—C—C.

[illegible]

After Armbruster had gone, he pushed the button that locked the door. He swallowed the sedative tablets one by one until he lost count. His last thought was an almost vengeful sense of justice.

STOP SMOKING

[illegible]

BOBY BUILDING

Powerful Dose—Two days. It is a nation's obligation to provide you with the most powerful and effective medicine available. It is a nation's obligation to provide you with the most powerful and effective medicine available. It is a nation's obligation to provide you with the most powerful and effective medicine available.

These remarkable books on real elegance, tolerance, wit, and common sense, are available in paperback for \$1.95 each. Write for your free copy to: **Dr. M. M. Sperling, Ltd., Department of Psychology, University of Toronto, 128 St. George Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.**

BE TALLER

[illegible]

Review

[illegible]

BALD MEN!

YOU can have savings, trouble-free, reliable, BETTER
HARBOR—TWO IN ONE! HERE, America's NEW
Savings Treatment for THIN, FAIRER, HARBOR
SUNBURN AS PIMPLES, PREVENTIVE
SUNBURN The Only skin-care THROUGH
SUNBURN—that's CORAL'S FREE GUARANTEE with it.

*I have one hair growing on my nose!"—J. C. Corbin
"Blemishes all gone!"—S. K. Belfair *I feel much
proudly told in the name of the skin for Algonquin.—J. B.
Belfair *I was covered on the nose."—J. M. Belfair
Algonquin's name—12 in 12

See FCC listing here: <http://www.fcc.gov/ELI/04/040601.htm> for the FCC's and FCC's decision "The FCC's action on your case."

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

Albert Einstein, Leonard, Haddadfield

WE'VE BEEN LOVELY

The friends YOU wish are making YOU

Pen-friends (home and overseas), personal friends (both sexes, all ages and classes), or life partners may be found through the medium of our wonderful Introductory Service.

Minisiting eye and nose mists, and include 1-244, mumps, and full stroke, immunization and Membership Form will be sent you as a welcome packet package.

Secretary, V.C.C., 34 HORTONHILL ROAD
LONDON, E.14 3JL.

HERE'S NEWS!

BOXING & WRESTLING MAGAZINE

PRICE



Here is the magazine you boxing and wrestling fans have been waiting for! A NEW MAGAZINE with a complete international slant for combat fans.

PRINTED IN COLOUR

Photos, Facts and Figures on the Fight Game. Contributed by America's and Britain's leading sports writers —

EDDIE BORDEN

CHARLES A. SMITH

NORMAN HURST

and your own FREDDIE MILLS



★ A Knock-out from Start to Finish ★

On sale the first Friday of every month, commencing August 1st. Ask your Newsagent HOW for this Super-Magazine. For Subscription rates apply to —

JIM DOBSON,
9, Ladywell Avenue,
Sheffield, T, ENGLAND

Tame Me this Beast



Kirkendall found the sheets of paper in
back of the case.

by **ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS**

*Professor Shaler thought his
experiment would free
humanity—but was he
creating a tool for autocrats?*

IN the compound Professor Shaler
was beating the Dyak, Tom, again.
Kirkendall could hear the sharp spot of
the lash and Shaler's voice telling Tom
that he was a pig and the son of a pig.
Since the Dyak was a Mohammedan

this business of being called a pig along much harder than the whip.

Kirkendall walked over to the compound and stood looking between the posts. The black leopard came so close to him as her chain permitted, making growling sounds. He reached down and scratched her ears. She purled in delight. He could remember when Green had brought her here, a spitting chunk of savage fury. Now she was completely tame.

Shaler's magic, Kirkendall thought. He knew there was no magic involved in the domestication of the leopard, that her tameness was a scientific achievement of the highest order. But he never could quite get out of his mind the feeling that these results were pure magic. Inside the compound he could see more of the same, the Dyak standing with his hands across his chest, taking a whipping he had done nothing to deserve and which, by all the rules of human reactions, he should resent violently.

The fact that he did not resent the whipping, that he did not respond emotionally to it at all, was all the more remarkable in view of the additional fact that this same Dyak had not many months past been a jungle wild man, his most important occupation the taking and curing of certain unusual trophies which had given his tribe the name of headhunters.

Shaler's magic again, Kirkendall thought. He pushed open the no longer locked gate of the compound and entered. Shaler noticed him. The lash of the whip flicked out and cracked across his arm and naked back. Unlike the Dyak, Kirkendall reacted—instantly.

"Damn you, Shaler!" Kirkendall's fist lashed out and connected with Shaler's chin. The little scientist stumbled backward across the compound and fell. He sat up, rubbed his jaw and grinned.

"Well done, Kirky."

NOT until then did Kirkendall fully realize the purpose in Shaler's mind when the little man struck him

with the whip. "You were using me as a control!" he gasped. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "I reacted before I thought."

"You did exactly what I wanted you to do," Shaler answered. He got to his feet, Kirkendall helping him, wrenched his jaw to make certain it was not broken, glanced at the Dyak. Tom had shown no interest in the fact that Shaler had been struck. No grant of satisfaction had escaped him when his tormentor had been knocked down. For all the response he showed, white men, in his opinion, customarily greeted each other with a lash from a whip—to which the proper response was a blow from a fist.

"Kirky, it begins to look as if we have done what we set out to do," Shaler said. Satisfaction sounded in his voice. The "we" was pure altruism. The discovery brought to perfection here was his own invention. Kirkendall, as his assistant, had had no part in it except to help with the heavy work, nor any real understanding of the process.

The gun at Kirkendall's hip revealed his biggest job, that of guard and protector against the dangers of the surrounding jungle. Shaler had hired Kirkendall before they left the United States, selecting him with an eye toward his courage as his war record against the Japanese among these jungle islands revealed.

Furthermore extensive tests had revealed Kirkendall as possessed of a dogged loyalty and an IQ that did not spurt into the upward regions of the scale. Not that Kirkendall was stupid—far from it. He was above average in intelligence but he was no genius.

They had come to the island together. Shaler had hired a gang of natives from a neighboring island to back the clearing out of the jungle and to erect the necessary huts and the compound. Then the natives had been sent home and Shaler, with Kirkendall's assistance, had begun his real work.

The two were the only white men on this lonely rain-soaked sun-drenched jungle island of the South Pacific. There

were two natives, Tom and his twin brother Freddie, along with one black leopard, all brought here by the trader, Carson, and sold to Shaler for the highest price the trader thought the trails would bear.

The experiment in progress here on this island was what Jerome Shaler called an attempt to domesticate earth's last great wild animal. The dog, the horse, the pig, the elephant, the camel and the cow were all domesticated in prehistoric times.

Tamed, for uncounted centuries they have borne man's burdens, given him food, clothing, loyal companionship. But Earth's last great wild animal has never been tamed—man himself. Civilization has never done more than lay a thin veneer over him.

Under this veneer the great beast himself is always visible, quick to resent a fancied wrong and hot to avenge it in blood, quick to sniff out a bargain, eager to buy cheap and to sell dear, quick to grab a gun, a knife, a poisoned spear or an atom bomb and rush forth to hunt his greatest enemy, his own kind.

Jerome Shaler, a little man in a faded sun helmet, dirty white pants, no shirt and no hair on his chest, one of the world's great authorities on the functioning of the human nervous system, proposed to change all this. It was his simple purpose to domesticate the beast of the city. By profession he was a psychologist, a topnotch man in his field. By inclination he was a dreamer.

This was his dream, the abolition of war, of political parties and politicians, of fascism, communism and all other forms of totalitarianism, the elimination of poverty, of hunger and of want, the re-creation of Eden, Paradise, the Happy Isles, the building of a world where all men have enough and none too little and none too much.

In short, Shaler proposed to take the aggrandizing impulse out of the human race, the urge that leads men to try to accumulate more than they can use themselves. In addition, he proposed to

modify the aggressive ego drives of the individual, to still the whisper that men have been hearing since the beginning of time, "What's in it for me?"

He was a little man but his dream was no little thing.

How did he plan to accomplish his dream? He planned to short-circuit the aggrandizing and aggressive impulses within the brain itself. His dream sprang out of the observation that in the animal world the male wolf does not fight his mate, the dog does not snap at the bitch, the stallion does not shrill his challenge to the mare. Between the sexes some force seems to hold in check the aggressive drives of the male. This was Shaler's starting point.

If the males could be kept from fighting the females, why couldn't they be kept from fighting each other? He believed it could be done. The aggressive impulses rising within the primitive brain he proposed to short-circuit so that they were never reflected in hostile actions.

The method he used to accomplish this short-circuiting was his own closely-guarded secret but Kirkendall knew that it involved some subtle drug. Their purpose here on this island was to prove what this drug would do under the most difficult circumstances, using wild animals and headhunting savages as subjects.

When the tests were complete Shaler planned to begin using his drug in the water supply systems of the cities of the United States. The drug was tasteless and only the finest chemical analysis would reveal its presence. For obvious reasons he intended that no one should ever know the drug had gone into the water supply systems.

WORKING in secret Shaler was trying to save a world. The effect he hoped to achieve would be a gradual day-to-day lessening of the conflict between individuals. Years after it had happened somebody might discover that something *had* happened, that the world

had somehow become again another Eden.

But would the drug work? Kirkendall considered Tom, standing in the hot sun in the middle of the compound, the whip marks visible as red streaks on his back. If Shaler could turn a headhunter into a man who would submit to the whip, then Shaler could indeed work wonders. At the thought Kirkendall felt his pulses quicken. He was a man who had seen miracles. The whine of the black leopard outside the compound made him even more aware of the true nature of that miracle.

"Go rest now, Tom," Shaler spoke. The native stood staring at them as if he had not heard. Shaler had to speak again before the native moved submissively toward the hut. The gate was no longer locked and he could leave at any time he chose.

Outside was the jungle, his native habitat. He could slip into that jungle and follow again his old wild life, fishing on the reefs, hunting in the green tangle that reached with relentless fingers toward the little clearing. The point was—he did not choose to leave. Not even the whip could drive him away.

KIRKENDALL and Shaler pushed open the gate and stepped outside the compound. From the strip of jungle less than forty yards away a long slender object flashed toward them, passed between them and thudded home into the log fence behind them—a spear. Kirkendall snatched the revolver from his hip and fired three smoking shots at the spot from which the spear had come with no observable result.

Shaler grinned. "Freddie's getting better," he said.

Freddie was Tom's twin brother. Whereas Tom had been treated with Shaler's drug, Freddie had been left what he was originally, a savage. He was the control, the individual left untreated for purposes of comparison.

Turned loose, Freddie had dived head-first into the jungle, from which he

planned and plotted his vengeance on the men who had brought him here. Probably nothing on Earth would have pleased Freddie more than the sight of Shaler's head drying nicely over a slow fire.

"That son-of-a-gun will kill us yet?" Kirkendall burst out. Freddie's ability with a spear or a knife or a sliver of poisoned bamboo thrust upward in a path so that the point was exactly where it would hit a careless walker in the leg was getting on the assistant's nerves.

"I've got you to keep him from potting us like sitting ducks," Shaler answered. Unaffected, he pulled the spear from the logs, examined the point. "Freddie has found a piece of iron somewhere and whetted it to a point on a rock," he said. "Ingenious devils, these natives."

"You sound pleased about him," Kirkendall complained.

Shaler's answer was another grin. In fact he was pleased. He liked Freddie. The native was an honest killer, an example of man in his natural state. The fact that Freddie had just tried to kill him and had almost succeeded in the attempt caused Shaler no concern. What else could you expect from a headhunter? Besides, Freddie went a long way toward proving the success of his experiment.

To Jerome Shaler nothing else mattered. This experiment was the culmination of his life's work, of years of patient research, and the money that had gone into it represented his life's savings. He poked the handle of the spear toward the black leopard, pushing it hard against her, smiled when her only response was to move away from the irritation.

"What comes next?" Kirkendall questioned.

"Next?" Shaler paused, thought carefully. "I'd like to have at least one more native, preferably two, for testing. If that is successful, next comes—" His eyes went appreciatively over the six-foot bulk of his assistant.

"You don't mean me?" Kirkendall said hastily.

Shaler nodded.

"But that wasn't part of our contract."

"I know it wasn't and you don't have to participate if you do not wish to. I don't mean you alone, I mean both of us."

"Oh," Kirkendall said. This was different, this was something that required thinking.

In the back of his mind a voice whispered, "What's in it for you?"

"We will have to test the response of several people conditioned by civilized life," Shaler continued. "Both of us, of course—presuming you agree—will check the results day by day, perhaps hour by hour. I don't want to make any mistakes and most certainly I do not wish to do you any harm."

"Well—" Kirkendall hesitated. "What would I get out of it? I mean—"

"Get out of it?" Shaler was astonished as if this question had never occurred to him. "If nothing else—peace, a serene outlook, a freedom from the day-to-day hates and hostilities that arise in all of us and which create the conflicts that warp us from our true nature."

"I'll have to think about it," Kirkendall said. He was shocked, perhaps a little frightened. Supposing the experiment didn't work on him? What then? And if it did work—"What's in it for you?" the voice whispered in the back of his mind. "You don't need an answer right away?" he said.

"Of course not," Shaler answered promptly.

"Well—" Out at the entrance to the lagoon, visible from this slight elevation, a moving object caught his eye. He looked at it for several seconds before he realized that he was seeing it or what it was. A tramp schooner moved there. "Hello," he said. "Garson's back."

"Where? Oh," Shaler said. "Good. He's probably got some more specimens for me."

While they watched the schooner came

to anchor and a boat put out for the sandy beach.

GARSON was a great dough-belly of a man with drooping mustache and the furtive eyes of a wary rat. Clad in dirty whites, gun in the holster at his hip almost touching the floor, he sat on a folding camp stool and drank raw rum and talked exuberantly to Shaler.

Kirkendall sat at the end of the table and listened. It was obvious to him that Garson was curious about the activity here in this clearing in the rain forest. Or perhaps curious was too mild a word.

"How are things coming with you, Professor Shaler?"

"So-so," Shaler answered.

Garson spat tobacco at a beetle crawling on the floor. "What did you say was the nature of your work here?" he asked.

"I'm an anthropologist," Shaler answered.

"Anthro—what?"

"A student of man," Shaler explained. He took a cigarette from the long flat case he always carried, offered one to the trader, who shook his head. "We are studying the reactions of primitive peoples to certain—ah—stimuli," he continued.

"Oh," Garson said heavily. His eyes went furtively around the hut, rested for a moment on the metal trunk under Shaler's cot, then looked quickly away. "Well, every man to his own trade, I always say, and the devil for all," He laughed. "I have some more merchandise for you."

"Good. What do you have?" Since merchandise in this case meant wild animals or wilder humans Shaler was instantly interested.

"A couple of blacks from Borneo," Garson answered. "I've got them on the ship." He gestured toward the lagoon.

"Go see if they will serve our purpose, Kirk," Shaler spoke.

"Sure," Kirkendall answered. He was glad to get away. The presence of Garson always irritated him. The fellow was

actually a slave trader, carrying on a secret and illegal traffic among the islands.

As Kirkendall left the hut, Garson was saying, "These are extra special specimens, professor. I'll have to have a thousand dollars apiece for them, in gold of course."

The trader always demanded gold for his merchandise. No other form of currency was acceptable to him. In this section of the world gold was the only satisfactory medium of exchange. With it you could buy what you wanted, including opium, pearls, girls and men. In the trunk under his cot Shaler had almost eight thousand dollars in gold coin.

Moving along the path toward the beach Kirkendall saw that a boat with two men was waiting there. The men he vaguely remembered as being members of Garson's crew. They nodded to him as he came near.

"Mr. Garson said I was to inspect the—ah—merchandise," he said.

They grinned. "Yes, sir, cap'n. Step right in the boat, cap'n."

As he stepped into the boat there came, from the direction of the clearing the sudden hard explosion of a gun.

Kirkendall jerked around to stare toward the source of the sound.

As he turned, one of the men hit him across the back of the head with a short length of rubber hose that had been filled with lead. Without a sound, he pitched forward out of the boat and fell face downward in the sand of the beach.

How long he was unconscious he did not know but eventually he became aware of sharp popping sounds. Rolling over and sitting up he pried the sand out of his eyes. The boat was still on the beach but the two men were gone. From the path that led upward to the clearing there came the sharp explosion of a gun, which he vaguely recognized as the popping sound that had dragged him back to consciousness.

The gunshot was not repeated. Coming down the path toward him were three men, Garson and two of the trad-

er's crew. They saw him. One lunged up what he thought was a hand to point at him. Only when the pointing hand suddenly exploded in smoke and a bullet whistled past him did he realize they were shooting at him. He dropped flat, reached for the gun in his own holster. His groping fingers found nothing.

After they had knocked him out the two men had gone up the trail to help Garson but they had taken the precaution of taking his gun with them.

He got to his feet, raced toward the jungle. Bullets whistled around his ears as he dived headfirst into the protection of the green tangle.

WHEN Kirkendall left the hut, Garson had asked the one question that he really wanted answered. "Of course, you can pay in gold?"

"Certainly," Shaler answered, "if the merchandise is satisfactory."

"Ah," Garson said. "Who is that coming up the path?" He glanced through the opening toward the beach.

Shaler turned to look. As he turned, Garson shot him in the head. Fortunately the bullet did not penetrate the brain but it gouged a groove across the top of the skull and knocked Shaler flat on his face, completely unconscious.

When he began to recover consciousness the first dazed thought in his mind was wonder at what had hit him. He was aware that he was hurt, that he must be very quiet or he would be hurt worse. From somewhere near him came a very pounding sound. Eventually, when he felt he could open his eyes a bit, he saw Garson in the act of beating the lock off the metal trunk that had served him as a safe.

He knew then that the trader had either shot him or slugged him. Garson was following a pattern as old as human history. Two white men and eight thousand dollars in gold on a lonely desert island. Mix in a slave-trading renegade, and there was only one answer. Too late, Shaler saw the inevitability of the pattern he had established here.

He was working to break up this identical pattern but his ultimate goal was ten thousand miles away in the United States. Maybe it was ten thousand years away too. Lying on the floor of that hut, watching Garson greedily pouring gold pieces into a stout canvas bag, Shaler had a premonition that the achievement of his goal was even farther than ten thousand years away.

When Garson finished sacking the gold he began feverishly to search the hut. The trader had never been satisfied with Shaler's explanation of their presence here. He apparently suspected there was something else of value hidden somewhere and was trying to find it.

Well, there was something else of value, three sheets of paper covered with formulas and explanations, but they were carefully hidden in the back of Shaler's cigarette case. They contained the secret of Shaler's drug for short-circuiting the aggrandizing and aggressive impulses of the human race.

Garson, with a look at Shaler, lifted the canvas sack and left the hut. Outside Shaler could hear the trader continuing his search. Shaler lifted himself on his hands, managed to sit up. A wave of giddy nausea swept over him at the movement.

Tenderly he explored the gash in his skull.

When the giddiness passed he tried to get to his feet, found his strength was not equal to the task.

"If I can't walk I'll crawl," he thought. With slow movement but with desperate purpose he began to crawl toward the cot. Under the pillow was a .45 Colt automatic. If he could get his hands on the gun he intended to use it.

Until now, he had not known that he was capable of such furious hatred. He could kill Garson now and never feel a quiver of conscience about it afterwards. But the question was—could he kill Garson? He did not know but when he got the Colt in his hands he knew he could try.

The trader had finished searching and

was moving down the path toward the lagoon when Shaler, holding the Colt in both hands, came stumbling out of the hut and started shooting at him.

Garson snapped a fast shot behind him, then ran. His men were coming up the path toward him. Shaler followed him.

For a few moments the quiet of the jungle was broken by blasts of gunfire. When the thunder stopped Shaler was down on the path and Garson and his two men were hurrying toward the boat that would carry them out to the schooner and thence to some place of refuge where no questions were ever asked about the origin of a man's wealth.

Shaler had a bullet through his left shoulder. He had another bullet through his left leg. The bone was broken and he could not walk. But he could crawl. And crawl he did. There was something indomitable about the little man. Leaving a trail of blood behind him he crawled all the desperate quarter of a mile back to the little clearing that had been hacked from the jungle growth.

"Kirk!" he called. His dazed mind did not recall that Kirkendall was not here. Only when the assistant did not answer him did he realize that he would have to do everything himself.

In the supply hut, locked in moisture and hug-proof metal lockers on the top shelf, were medical supplies, opiates to dull the jagging streaks of fire-hot pain screaming through his broken leg, sulfa to sprinkle on his wounds, penicillin to stop the infection that he knew would shortly be raging through his body. Last of all there were bandages, splints to hold a broken bone in place while it healed.

He would be laid up for weeks but with the modern wonder drugs to stop infection and with proper care he would become a well man again. The affair with Garson would be only a strange interlude, a brief moment when the old drives of the human race had held away. But would hold away no longer once he got his magic drug into action!

The urge to live was a pounding rhythm in his body. He knew he could apply the medicine himself, perhaps he could even apply the splints.

"Kirkendall!" he called again. Where was the man, he wondered fretfully. Not until he had called a dozen times did he realize that his assistant was not here.

AT the cost of breath-taking agony he crawled to the supply hut, managed to push open the door, to wriggle his way inside. As he saw what faced him here he tasted the full meaning of complete despair.

The medicine boxes were on the top shelf. No matter how hard he tried there was simply no way he could reach them without help. If they had been back in the United States they could not have been farther out of his reach.

He lay there on the dirt floor of the hut and cursed Garcia and Kirkendall and the whole human race. Then, as the door was pushed open again, and a face peered inside, he stopped cursing.

Tom stood there.

"Tom, help me."

The Dyak squatted down beside him, grinned like a friendly but slightly stupid ape.

Shaler gestured toward the medicines. "Boxes help longside me."

Tom made no move toward the boxes. It was not that he did not understand—he knew well enough what was wanted of him—it was simply that the treatment he had received and which had short-circuited all his aggressive and hostile impulses had also short-circuited all generous impulses too.

"He hurt bad," Shaler said.

Tom shrugged. The whip had demonstrated his indifference to pain in himself.

He was equally indifferent to pain in somebody else. If Shaler was suffering, so what?

Tom wasn't getting even with the man who had whipped him. He was indifferent to revenge, as indifferent as he was to pain, to suffering, to death

itself. He was a docile, a tamed, but a mindless creature. He was a slave.

As he realized the truth there on the dirt floor of the hut, with the slow drip of his own blood turning the dirt to mud, Jerome Shaler came face to face with his failure to domesticate earth's last great wild animal. He hadn't done the job—he had failed.

Perhaps the job could be done—he did not know about that—but he knew he had not done it. He saw also the danger of the treatment he had devised. All he had done was to create a method of making a nation of docile super-slaves.

He tried to get the cigarette case out of his pocket in a last desperate effort to correct the mistake he had made. Not that anything could be done to change the formulae. All that could be done now was to destroy them. They were a source of danger potentially greater than the atom bomb.

Hours later, when Kirkendall finally got back to the clearing and found him, he was still trying to get the cigarette case out of his pocket.

"The cigarette case—burn it, Kirk," he whispered.

It was his last effort to undo his mistake. As he spoke he died.

Kirkendall found the sheets of paper in the back of the case. All night long he studied the formulae, the step-by-step process in the distillation of the drug Shaler had used on Tom. The process was clear—too clear. He could understand it.

He saw quite clearly the error Shaler had made, that the little psychologist had created a method of making slaves instead of free men. All night long a still small voice whispered to him, "Here's your big chance."

To give him credit he tried to fight against that voice but little by little it grew stronger. "You can be a king," it whispered. "You can start with a single little town somewhere, you can make yourself a boss. Slowly and steadily you can grow bigger. Pretty soon you will be boss of a county, then of a state, then—"

There was no limit to what he might be.

The voice kept coming back again and again to the idea of being a king. Perhaps the first man to discover how to control fire heard this same voice. Perhaps it whispered to the inventor who first learned how to chip flint into a knife, how to mold copper into a spear-head, how to melt and cast iron.

It whispered that if he used his discovery just right, he could become Mr. Big, with servants to wait on him and women to please him and his will law everywhere. All night long, with Shaler's body lying on the cot and Tom dreaming in the corner, Ralph Kirkendall argued with the voice that whispered to him.

With the dawn he knew it had won.

Haggard-eyed, his face drawn, but flushed inside with dreams of what he would be, he stepped outside the hut. No Oriental potentate ever dreamed grander dreams of luxury than Ralph Kirkendall at this moment.

The power of Genghis Khan, of Tem-

erlane, was his and all men would be his servants.

As he stood there in the door, the poisoned spear struck him full in the chest.

Freddie was still on the job. Without knowing he had done it Freddie had cast perhaps the most important spear ever thrown by any head-hunter. . . .

In the months that followed the swift jungle growth lapped like a green tide over the clearing. Within a year it would have been hard to find the spot where Jerome Shaler had made his experiments.

Within two years the jungle had taken back its own.

In the depths of that jungle live two savages, one a proud and fearless hunter, the second a docile obedient slave—Freddie and Tom. Perhaps someday an outtrigger canoe will land there and will take them away. Meanwhile Freddie's proudest possessions, to which Tom is completely indifferent, are two well-cured human heads.

ROY ROGERS

COWBOY COMIC

★

Follow the adventures of Roy Rogers and Trigger
in this exciting and action-packed monthly.
Obtainable at most newsagents and bookstalls.

6th



Birthplace of Creation

A Captain Future Novelet by EDMOND HAMILTON

CHAPTER I

Citadel of the Futuremen

GARRAND watched the face of the Moon grow larger in the forward port of his small cruiser. A white and terrible face, he thought. A death's-head with meteor-gnawed bones and gaping crater-wounds, bleak and cruel and very silent, watching him come and thinking secret boding thoughts about him. A feeling of sickness grew in him.

"I am a fool and soon I will probably be a dead fool," he said to himself.

He was not a brave man. He was very fond of living and he did not think of death at all as a thing to be dared and laughed at. The knowledge that he was likely to die there on the Moon gave him quivers of physical anguish that made him look as white and hollow as the steady face that watched him through

the port. And yet he did not turn back. There was something in Garrand that was stronger than his fear. His hands trembled, but they held the cruiser grimly on its course.

The stark plains and mountain ranges took size and shape, the lonely mountains of the Moon that looked on nothing and the plains where nothing stirred, not even the smallest wind or whirl of dust. Men had gone out to other worlds and other stars. They had ranged far across space, founding colonies on asteroids and cities on the shores of alien seas. But they left the deathly airless Moon alone. They had looked at it once and gone away. There were only four who made the Moon their home—and not all of these four were men.



*In their final adventure
the Futuremen are called on to
save the Universe itself
from a madman's destructive whim!*

Tycho Crater widened out below the battle ship. Licking dry lips metallic with the taste of fear, Garrand consulted a map, drawn carefully to scale and showing in that desolation one intricate diagram of a man-made structure. There

were ominous gaps in that diagram and Garrand was painfully aware of them. He made his calculations and set his ship down well beyond the outer periphery of defenses marked on the chart.

His landing was a clumsy nervous one.

White pumice-dust burst upward around the hull and settled slowly back again. Garrand cut his jets and sat for a moment looking out across Tycho, all ringed around in the distance with cliffs and spires and pinnacles of blasted rock that glittered in the light. There was no sign of the structure indicated on the chart. It was all below ground. Even its observatory dome was set flush, reflecting the Sun's unsoftened glare no more than the surrounding plain.

PRESENTLY Garrand rose, moving with the stiff reluctance of a man going to the gallows. He checked over the bulky shapes of a considerable mass of equipment. The examination was minute and he made one or two readjustments. Then he struggled into a pressure suit and opened the airlock. The air went out with a whistling rush and after that there was no sound, only the utter silence of a world that has heard nothing since it was made.

Working in that vacuum Garrand carried out a light hand-sledge and set it in the dust. Then he brought out the bulky pieces of equipment and loaded them onto it. He was able to do this alone because of the weak gravitation and when he was through he was able for the same reason to tow the sledge behind him.

He set off across the crater. The glare was intense. Sweat gathered on him and ran in slow trickles down his face. He suffered in the heavy armor, setting one weighted boot before the other, with the little puffs of dust rising and falling back at every step, hauling the sledge behind him. And fear grew steadily in him as he went on.

He knew—all the System knew—that the four who lived here were not here now, that they were far away on a distant troubled world. But their formidable name and presence seemed to haunt this lifeless sphere and he was walking now into the teeth of the deadly defenses they had left behind them.

"They can be beaten," he told himself, sweating. "I've got to beat them."

He studied his map again. He knew exactly how far he had come from the ship. Leaving himself a wide margin of safety he activated the detector-mechanism on the sledge. The helmet of his pressure-suit was fitted with ultra-sensitive hearing devices that had nothing to do with sonic waves but translated sub-electronic impulses from the detector into audible sound-signals.

He stood still, listening intently. But the detector said nothing and he went on, very slowly now and cautiously, across the dead waste until his footsteps in the dust approached the line of that outer circle on the map. Then the detector spoke with a faint small clicking.

Garrand stopped. He bent over the panel of the mechanism, a jumble of dials, sorters, frequency-indicators and pattern-indicators. Above them a red pip burned in a ground-glass field. His heart hammered hard and he reached hastily for a black oblong bulk beside the detector.

He thought, "I'm still far enough away so that the blast won't be lethal if this doesn't work."

The thought was comforting but unconvincing. He forced his hand to steady, to pick up the four-pronged pligs and insert them, one by one in the proper order, into the side of the detector. Then he dropped behind the sledge and waited.

The black oblong hummed. He could feel it humming where his shoulder touched the metal of the sledge. It was designed to pick up its readings from the detector, to formulate them, adjust itself automatically to the indicated pattern and frequency, to broadcast an electronic barrier that would blank out the impulse-receptivity of the hidden trap's sensor-unit. That was its purpose. It should work. But if it did not . . .

He waited, the muscles of his belly tensed tight. There was no flash or tremor of a blast. After he had counted slowly to a hundred he got up again and looked. The red pip had faded from the ground-glass screen. There was a white

one in place of it.

Gairaud watched that white pip as though it were the face of his patron saint, hauling the sledge on slowly through that outer circle and through the ones beyond it that were only guessed at. Three times more the urgent clicking sounded in his ears and the dials and pointers changed—and three times the pip faded from red to white and Gairaud was still alive when he reached the metal valve door set into the floor of the crater.

The controls of that door were plainly in sight but he did not touch them. In-

to the very threshold of this most impregnable of all places in the Solar System.

He did not relax his caution. A large mass of equipment went with him down the dark stairway, including the scanner. The valve closed automatically behind him and below in a small chamber he waited until pressure had built up and another door automatically opened. He found nothing more of menace except a system of alarm bells, which he put out of commission—not because there was anyone to hear them but because he knew there would be recorders and he

—WELL DONE AND FAREWELL—



AFTER starting in nineteen novels and seven novellas of this current series, Curt Newton and his faithful trio of comrades—Simon Wright, the Brain; Otto, the android; and Grog, the robot—are taking off on an indefinite leave of absence, doubtless for some star far from their secret fortress upon the dark side of the Moon.

This secret room has been an exciting one, a happy one for all concerned—but it is time again for them to be on their galactic way. If their fortunes permit they may, in time, be back in the pages of this magazine to tend to their incredible affairs. So do not say good-bye but farewell.

—THE EDITOR.

stead he hauled a portable scanner off the sledge and used it to examine the intimate molecular structure of the metal and all its control connections. By this means he found the particular bolt-head that was a switch and turned it, immobilizing a certain device set to catch an unknowing intruder as soon as he opened the valve.

Within minutes after that Gairaud had the door open and was standing at the head of a steep flight of steps, going down. His heart was still thudding away and he felt weak in the knees—but he was filled with exultation and a great pride. Few other men, he thought, perhaps none, could have penetrated safely

wanted no signs, audible or visible, of his visit.

THE recorders themselves were relatively easy to detect. With an instrument brought for the purpose he blasted off their relay systems and went on across the great circular central chamber with the glassite dome through which the sunlight poured. He peered with a scientist's fascinated wonder at the laboratory apparatus of various sorts in that and the smaller chambers which opened off it until he came to what of all things he was looking for—the heavy locked door of a vault, sunk deep in the lunar rock.

Garrand worked for a long time over that door. The silence was beginning to get to him and the uneasy knowledge that he was where he had no right to be. He began to listen for the voices and the steps of those who might come in and find him.

They were far away and Garrand knew that he was safe.

But he was not a criminal by habit and now that the challenge to his skill was past he began to feel increasingly guilty and uneasy. Personal belongings accused him, an open book, a pair of boots, beds and chests and clothing. If it had been merely a laboratory he would not have minded so much—but it was also a dwelling place and he felt like a common thief.

THAT feeling was forgotten when he entered the vault. There were many things in that vast lunar cavern, but Garrand had no more than a passing glance for any of them except the massive file-racks where the recorded data which related to voyages were spooled and kept.

Under the clear light that had come on of itself with the opening of the door Garrand searched the racks, puzzling out the intricate filing system. He had taken off his helmet. His hands shook visibly and his breathing was loud and irregular but these were only secondary manifestations.

His mind, faced with a difficult problem to solve, slipped by long habit into calculating-machine efficiency and it was not long before he found what he wanted.

He took the spool in his two hands, as tenderly as though it were made of the delicate stuff of dreams and apt to shatter at a breath. He carried it to the large table that stood by the racks and fed the end of the tape into a reader. His face had grown pale and quite rigid except that his mouth twitched a little at the corners. He set up his last piece of equipment beside the reader, a photosonic recorder used

to make copies of a master spool, synchronized them and then closed the switches.

The two spools unwound, one giving, the other receiving, and Garrand remained motionless over the viewer, seeing visions beyond price and listening to the voices that spoke of cosmic secrets. When the spool was finished it was a long time before he moved. His eyes were still busy with their visions and they were strangely dull and shining all at once, shining and far away.

At last he shook himself and laughed, a small grating sound that might well have been a sob. He replaced the original in the rack and put the second spool into a special pouch on his belt. In the vault he left everything exactly as he had found it and when he came out again onto the Moon's surface he reset the hidden trigger that guarded the outer door.

As he had penetrated the defences on the plain, so he went back through them again, in a double agency lost now, when he had the thing he had taken such incredible chances for, he should blunder and be killed. The shadows of the crater edge were crawling toward him, sharp and black. The last premonitory clicking of the detector, the last fading of the warning pip from red to white and he was safe, running toward the ship into the knife-edged darkness of the shadow.

Long before night came Garrand was gone, plunging across the narrow gulf to Earth. He did not know how to give vent to the wildness of his exultation, so he held it in but it burned in his face and eyes.

"Tomorrow," he said aloud to himself, over and over. "Tomorrow we'll be on our way." He laughed, addressing someone who was not present. "You said I couldn't do it, Herrick. You said I couldn't!"

Behind him the darkening face of the Moon looked after him.

CHAPTER II

Cosmic Secret

FOUR came home to the Moon after many days. Four, of whom only one was an ordinary man.

Curt Newton, the man—Otho, the android or artificial man who was human in everything but origin—Grag, the towering metal man or intelligent robot—and Simon Wright, he who had once been a man but whose brain only now lived on in a strange mechanical body.

Their ship came down like a thunderbolt of metal from the sky. The camouflaged doors of an underground hangar opened silently to receive it and closed as silently.

Into the great circular room beneath the observatory dome the four Future-men came. Curt Newton paused by the wall to activate the recorder panel. It showed blank. It always showed blank.

He sat down slowly, a tall man with red hair and a bronzed face that looked now very tired.

"Do you think our work out there will stick, Simon?" he asked.

He addressed the small square metal case hovering on motor-beams before him, its strange "face" of lens-eyes turned toward him. The serum-case, in which Simon Wright's brain lived its life.

"I am confident," said Simon with his precise articulation of metallic artificial accents, "that there will be no more trouble between Uranus Mines and the natives."

Curt frowned and sighed. "I hope so. When will they learn how to deal with planetary primitives?"

Grag spoke up loudly. He was standing, a seven-foot giant of metal, with his head turned and his photoelectric eyes staring intently across the big room.

"Curt, someone's been here," his great voice boomed.

"No. I checked the recorders," Newton said without turning.

"I don't care," Grag persisted. "That chair by the vault door has been moved. I was the last one out when we left and I remember exactly where it stood. It's been moved a good three inches."

Otho burst into laughter. "Listen to Old Hawkeye. Three inches!" The android, so perfectly human in appearance that only something bright and strange lurking in his green eyes betrayed an inner difference, went on mockingly, "Are you sure it's not two and a half inches?"

Grag began to protest angrily in his foghorn voice. Curt swung around irritably to silence them. But Simon Wright said gravely, "Wait, Curtis. You know that the constitution of Grag's metal brain makes his memory absolutely photographic. If he says the chair has been moved it has been moved."

"But the recorders?"

"They could have been blanked, you know. It's theoretically possible."

"Only theoretically—" Curt began and then he stopped and swore. "Elast you, Grag! Why did you have to raise a doubt in my mind? Now I'll have to take down the recorders to check them and that's the devil and all of a job."

Irritation riding him, he went out of the big room and came back with tools. He scowled at Grag. "You'd better be right!"

Simon and Otho helped him in the delicate work of disassembling the recorders. They examined both the microfilm and the interior relay circuits bit by bit.

Curt's irritation left him suddenly. He looked sharply at the others. He had found it—the minute blurred line where the film had started to roll and been arrested. The relay circuits were a fraction of a decimal out of synchronization now.

Otho whistled softly. "Blanked!" he said. "And so beautifully done—nothing fused or blown out, the disengagement so small that you'd never notice it unless

you were searching for it."

"So I was right?" Grag boomed triumphantly. "I knew I was right. When I see a thing that's changed I—"

"Shut up," Curt Newton told him. He looked, puzzled, at Simon. "No criminal did this—no ordinary criminal. The job of blanking these relays required tremendous scientific ability."

Simon brooded, hovering. "That's obvious. Only an expert in sub-electronics would be capable. But that seems incongruous. Why would a top scientist come prowling in here like a common thief?"

Curt turned. "Grag, will you see if anything else has been moved or taken?"

The metal giant started stalking through the rooms. Curt remained silent and thoughtful, the frown on his tanned face deepening.

Grag came back. "No. Nothing else has been tampered with."

"Yet it was," Curt said slowly. He looked again at Simon. "I've been thinking. An expert in sub-electronics . . . Do you remember the nuclear physics man down at New York Tech whom we met at Government Center a few months ago?"

"Garris? Gerrand—some name like that? I remember. A nice little man."

"Yes, I thought so too—very eager about his work. But I remember now he asked me a question—"

CURT broke off suddenly. He went rapidly across the big room, unlocked the vault door and inside the silent lunar cavern he went straight to the files.

Simon had followed him. And when Simon saw the spool that Curt drew from the file his lens-eyes turned to Curt's face with a startled swiftness.

"Curtis, no! You don't think—"

"It was what he asked me about," Curt said. "The Birthplace."

The word went echoing solemnly back and forth around the cold rock walls. And Curt stared at Simon, not really seeing him, seeing uncanny awesome things that lived in memory, and a

strange look came into his face—a strange look indeed for the man Curt Newton. A look of fear.

Simon said, "How could he know of the Birthplace?"

That word had never been spoken to anyone. They hardly spoke it even among themselves. Such a secret was not for the knowledge nor the use of men and they had guarded it more carefully than the sum total of all other knowledge they possessed. Now the very sound of that name brought Grag and Otto to the door and wrought a sudden tension that filled the cavern with a waiting stillness.

Curt said heavily, "He connected the theoretical possibility with the work we did on Mercury. He's a brilliant man, Simon—too brilliant."

"Perhaps," said Grag, "he only looked for the secret and couldn't find it. After all, our filing system . . ."

Curt shook his head. "If he could get in here he could find what he wanted." He examined the spool. "He could make a copy of this and there would be no way of telling that it had been done."

He stood motionless for a moment longer and no one spoke. Otto studied his face and shot one quick bright glance at Simon. Simon moved uneasily on his gliding force-beams.

Curt replaced the spool and turned. "We've got to find out about this man. We'll go to New York, at once."

Very soon thereafter the Comet rose from the dark gap of the hangar-mouth and shot away toward the great green globe of Earth.

Not much later, at headquarters of the Planet Police in New York, old Marshal Ezra Gurney stared at Curt Newton in blank amazement.

"Gerrand?" he said. "But he's a respectable man, a scientist!"

"Nevertheless," said Curt grimly, "I want all the information you can get and fast."

Simon spoke. "This is urgent, Ezra. We cannot afford delay."

The grinked old specimen glanced

from one to the other, and then to Otho. "Something really bad, eh? All right, I'll do what I can."

He went out of the office. Otho leaned against the wall and remained motionless, watching Curt. Simon hovered near the desk. Neither one of them was afflicted with nerves. Curt moved restlessly about, brooding, his hands touching things and putting them down again in wire-taut gestures. The intricate multichron on the wall whirled softly and the minutes slid away, on Earth, on Mars, on the far-flung worlds of the System. No one spoke and Ezra did not come back.

Simon said at last, "It would take time, even for Ezra."

"True!" said Curt. "If Garrand has the secret we have no time."

He paced the small neat room, a man oppressed with heavy thoughts. The sound of the door opening brought him whirling around to face Ezra almost as though he were facing his executioner. "Well?"

"Garrand took off from Earth on the twenty-first," said Ezra. "He flew a ship of his own, apparently an experimental model on which he has been working for some time in company with a man named Herrick, who is also listed as chief pilot. Destination, none. Purpose, cosmic ray research beyond the System. Because of Garrand's reputation and standing there was no difficulty about the clearance. That was all I could get."

"That's enough," said Curt. "More than enough." His face was bleak and the color had gone out of it under the tan. He looked very tired and in a way so strange that Ezra came up to him and demanded, "What is it, Curt? What did Garrand take from the laboratory?"

Curt answered, "He took the secret of the Birthplace of Matter."

Ezra stared, uncomprehending. "Is that a secret you can tell me?"

CURT said hopelessly, "I can tell you now. For it's known now to Garrand and this other man."

"What is it, then?"

"Ezra, it is the secret of creation."

There was a long silence. It was obvious from Gurney's face that the term was too large for him to understand. Yet Curt Newton did not continue as yet. He looked beyond them and his face was drawn and haggard.

"We'll have to go back there," he said, his voice low. "We'll have to. And I hoped never to go back."

Simon's expressionless eyes were fixed on him. Otho said loudly, "What's there to be afraid of? We ran the whirls before. And as for Garrand and the other one—"

"I am not afraid of them," Curt Newton said.

"I know," said Simon. "I was the only one who was with you in the shrine of the Watchers there. I know what you are afraid of—yourself."

"I still don't get it," Ezra said. "The secret of creation? Creation of what?"

"Of the universe, Ezra. Of all the matter in the universe."

A strange wonder came on Gurney's time-worn face. He said nothing. He waited.

"You remember," Curt told him, "when we came back from our first deep-space voyage? You remember that right after that we designed the electron-assembly plants that they've used ever since to replenish Mercury's thinning atmosphere? Where do you think we got the knowledge to do that, to juggle electrons into desired types of matter on a big scale?"

Gurney's voice was a whisper now. "You got that knowledge out in deep space?"

"In deep, deep space, Ezra. Near the center of our galaxy, amid the thick star-clusters and nebulae beyond Sagittarius. There lies the beating heart of our universe."

He made a gesture. "Back in the Twentieth Century the scientist Millikan first guessed the truth. The matter of the universe constantly melts away into radiation. Millikan believed that some-

where in the universe was a place where radiation was somehow built back into matter and that the so-called cosmic rays were the "birth-cry" of the newborn matter. The fount of our material universe, the birthplace of material creation."

Awe was in Ezra's faded old eyes. "And you found that? And never told—never let anyone guess—"

"Garland guessed," Curt said bitterly. "He connected our work at Mercury with our mysterious voyage. He tried to learn what I knew and when I would tell him nothing he came to the Moon and risked death to steal our records. And now he's gone to find it for himself."

Simon Wright said somberly, "He will only reap disaster if he tries to take it. I saw what almost happened there to you, Curtie."

"It's my fault," Curt said harshly. "We should have left no record. But I could not quite destroy it." He paused, then went on rapidly. "We've got to overtake him. What the other man, Herrick, may have in mind we can't tell. But Garland is a fanatical researcher, who will tamper with the instruments of the Watchers as I did. He won't stop where I stopped!"

Ezra jumped to his feet. "I can have cruisers after him in an hour."

"They couldn't catch him now, Ezra. The Comet might. We'll have to make certain preparations and they'll take time. But even so we may catch him."

He turned, moving swiftly toward the door as though physical action were a relief from overpowering tension. Ezra stopped him. "Curt, wait! Let me go with you. I should, you know, if it's a case of catching a lawbreaker."

Newton looked at him. "No, Ezra. You're only trapped by the lure of this thing as I was. As I was . . . No."

Simon's metallic voice intervened. "Let him go with us, Curtie. I think we might need him—that you might need him."

A look passed between them. Then,

silently, Curt nodded.

Back to the Moon, with five instead of four, went the Comet on wings of flame. In the hours that followed, the closed hangar-doors in silent Tycho gave no hint of the desperate rushed activity beneath.

But less than twenty-four hours after its return from Uranus the ship left the Moon a second time. It went out through the planetary orbits like a flying prisoner breaking out through bars, poised for a moment beyond Pluto to shift into a new kind of motion, then was gone into the outer darkness.

CHAPTER III

The Birthplace

THE Comet was a flock, a moté, a tiny gleam of man-made light falling into infinity. Behind it, lost somewhere along the farthest shores of a lightless sea, lay Earth and Sol and the outposts of familiar stars. Ahead was the great wilderness of Sagittarius, the teeming star-jungle that to the eye seemed crowded thick with burning Suns and nebulae.

The five within the ship were silent. Four were busy with the memories they had of the time they had come this way before, with the knowledge of what was still to be encountered. One, Ezra Gurney, could find no words to speak. He was a veteran spaceman. He had been a veteran when Curt Newton from Pluto to Mercury and back again and he knew how the naked undimmed stars could shine.

But this was different—this voyaging of deepest space, this pursuing of the fleets and navies of the stars to their own harbor, this going in among them. In a way Ezra Gurney was afraid. No man, not even Curt Newton, could look at that flaming sky ahead and not be a

little afraid.

The Comet had come into the region of the great clusters. Mighty hives of gathered Suns blazed and swarmed, rolling across space and time, carrying after them sweeping trains of scattered stars. Between and beyond the clusters and their trailing star-streams shone the glowing clouds of nebulae, banners of light hung out for a million miles across the firmament, ablaze with the glow of drowned and captured Suns. And beyond them all—the nebulae, the clusters and the stars—there showed the black brooding lightless immensity of a cloud of cosmic dust.

The soul of Ezra Gurney awoke within him. Men had no business here in this battleground of angry gods. Men? But was he here with men?

"One-point-four degrees zenith," came the metallic voice of Simon Wright from where he hovered above a bulky instrument.

"Check," Curt Newton said and moved controls slightly. Then he asked, "Dust?"

"Definitely higher than average interstellar density now," Otho reported, from his own place at the wide instrument panel. "It'll thicken fast as we approach the main cloud."

Ezra looked at them—at the square, hovering metal case of the living brain, at the lithe eager android peering forward into the abyss with burning green eyes, at the giant imperturbable metal bulk of the robot.

Not men, no! He was out here in the great deeps, rushing toward the mightiest secret of infinity, with creatures unhuman, with—

Curt turned, and smiled briefly and wearily at him. And the clamoring panic in Ezra was suddenly gone. Why, these were his oldest staunchest friends, unshakably loyal and true.

He drew a long breath. "I don't mind telling you that it's nearly got me down."

"You've got worse coming," Curt said uncomfortingly. "We'll hit the main cloud soon."

"The cloud?"

"The great cloud of cosmic dust that surrounds the Birthplace. That dust is born from the Birthplace—and flows out in mighty tides through our whole universe."

"To be born into new worlds?"

"Yes. Weizsaecker fathomed that part of the cycle, long ago in the nineteen forties when he formulated his theory of the gathering of the cosmic dust into new planets."

Before them now rose a wall of Suns, glaring like cyclopean furnaces as the Comet seemingly crawled toward them. Almost it seemed that they could hear the clang and thunder of cosmic forges as their tiny craft approached and went between the flaming gums.

White and wild flared a far-flung nebula to the left beyond that rampart of stars. But ahead there gloomed farther still the black cloud that now seemed eating up the universe with jaws of darkness as they steadily approached it.

"No sign of any other ship outside the cloud," Otho reported coolly. "Our detectors won't range inside it, of course."

"They had too big a start," Curt said broodingly. "Too many days. Garrand and the other must already have been on the world of the Watchers for some time."

"Unless the whirls wrecked them," Otho suggested.

"Wishful thinking," Curt said. "We ran the whirls and so could they."

Simon said, "Curtis, you will not go into the shrine of the Watchers again?"

Curt Newton did not look at him. "I'll have to if that's where Garrand is."

"You don't have to, Curtis. We three could go."

NOW, Curt looked at Simon, his tanned face set and unreadable. "You don't trust me with the power of the Watchers?"

"You know what that power almost did to you before. It is for you to say."

Curt looked ahead and said doggedly,

"I am not afraid and I will go in there after him."

Eara Gurney, puzzled by the tension between them, asked, "Who are the Watchers?"

"They have been dead for ages," Curt said slowly. "But long ago they penetrated the Birthplace and conquered its secret and set up instruments to wield its powers. It's why we have come. Garand must not use those instruments."

"Nobody must use them," said Simon.

Curt said nothing to that.

Gurney, looking ahead, saw the black cloud widening out across the starry universe like a great tide of doom, steadily blotting out the stars. A fitting cosmic shroud for the greatest of cosmic secrets, he thought. Its fringes engulfed bright stars that shone wanly through the dimness like dying eyes.

"This dust," said Simon, "is newborn matter, spawned by the Birthplace and pumped outward by pressure of radiation to flow out to the whole universe."

"And the—the secret itself—is inside?"

"Yes."

There was no moment when the Comet plunged suddenly within the cloud. Rather the dust thickened steadily until all about the flying ship was a deepening haze, deepest and darkest ahead but drawing more and more veils behind them so that the stars back there shone like smothered witch-fires.

The ship began to tremble as it encountered flowing spatial currents of denser dust. Struts and girders protested with slight creakings and then more loudly. They strapped into the recoil-chairs at Curt's orders.

"Here it comes," said Grag in loud complaint. "I remember last time almost every bone in my body was broken."

Otho laughed. He started a caustic retort but had no time to voice it.

To Gurney the Comet seemed suddenly to have crashed. The tail-tales on the panel went crazy and the recoil-chairs screamed in outrage as the ship was

batted through the haze by unseen giant hands.

There was nothing they could do but hang on. There was nothing even for Curt to do. The automatic pilot and stabilizers had to do it all now or they were finished.

The mechanisms functioned staunchly. Again and again they snatched the buffeted little ship out of raging eddies of dust-currents and hurled it forward again. Now the whole hull was creaking and groaning from constantly changing stresses and the bias of dust against its plates became a rising and falling roar.

Eara Gurney felt a quaking dread. He had already seen too much, had come too far. Now he felt that a universe become sentient and hostile was wrathfully repelling them from its hidden heart, from its supreme secret.

The Comet fought forward, reluctantly impeded by its own mechanical brains, until the dust began to thin. It tore onward, still buffeted by swirling currents and drenched by radiation. And now, ahead, Earra saw a vast hazy space inside the denser blackness of the cloud. And far away in this inner space, looming in vague gigantic splendor . . .

"Good God!" said Earra Gurney and it was a prayer. "Then that—that . . ."

Curt Newton's eyes were alight with a strange glow. "Yes—the Birthplace."

The hazy space within the denser cloud was vast. And at its center barked and gleamed and shifted an enigmatic glory—a colossal spinning spiral of white radiance. Its whirling arms spanned millions of miles and it uttered cosmic lightnings of radiation that lanced out through the haze.

Beating heart of the universe, fiery womb that spawned the stuff of worlds, awesome epicenter of cosmos! Cloaked and shrouded by the dense black cloud of its own making, safe behind its ramparts of terrible whirlpools and the wild tide-runs of untamed matter fresh from creation, it flamed across its millions of miles of space, shaped like a spiral

nebula, spinning, whirling, sending forth its seed to the farthest corners of the galaxy.

And to Ezra Gurney, cowering in his seat and staring at that far-off misty glory, it seemed that the eyes of men were not meant to see nor their minds to comprehend this shining Birthplace. "Surely," he whispered, "surely we're not going into that!"

Curt Newton nodded. He had still that strange look in his eyes, a look almost mystic, as though he could see beyond the wonder and the glory of the Birthplace to its innermost secret heart and glimpse there the hidden laws by which it worked and carried out its destiny.

"Yes," said Curt, "we're going in." He leaned forward over the controls, his face bathed in the misty radiance so that it seemed not his familiar face at all but the countenance of a being half god-like with the strange light flickering in his eyes.

"You see how it is, Ezra?" he asked. "How it spins like a great centrifuge, sucking in the spent energy of Suns and whirling it in currents of incalculable strength until, in some utterly undreamable way, the energy coagulates into electrons and protons which are thrown off in never-ending streams from the rim of the vortex.

"They form the shining haze that fills this hollow around the Birthplace. Then, farther out, they unite to form the storms of cosmic dust. The pressure of radiation forces them on across the galaxy. And out of these new worlds are made."

Ezra Gurney shivered. He did not speak.

"Curse!" Simon's voice was loud with a kind of warning and Curt Newton started, leaning back in his seat and turning again to the controls of the Comet. His face had tightened and his eyes were veiled.

AND the ship sped on across that vast hollow in the heart of the dark

cloud. And swift as its flight was it seemed only to creep slowly, slowly, toward the misty wheel of radiance. Pale witch-fires danced along its hull, growing brighter until the metal was enveloped in veils of flame, tenuous, cold and having about them an eerie quality of life. The Comet was double-shielded against the radiation but even so Ezra Gurney could feel the echoes of that terrible force in his own flesh.

The flaming arms of the Birthplace reached wider and wider across space. The radiance deepened, became a supernatural brilliance that scared the flinching eyeballs. The ship began to be shaken now and again by subtle tremors as the farthest edges of out-thrown currents touched it and passed by.

Ezra shut his teeth hard to keep from screaming. He had been driven once too close to the Sun and he had looked hard into the depths of the atomic furnace that was about to swallow him. He had not then known one tenth of the fear that he knew now.

Slitting his eyes against the glare he could make out the central sphere from which the spiral arms curved out, a gigantic vortex of flaming force, the wheel-hub of the galaxy. The Comet was plunging straight toward it and there was nothing he could do to stop it, nothing . . .

Curt sent the ship driving in between two of the sweeping arms. Tidal-waves, torrents of energy picked them up and flung them, a leaf in the cosmic mill-race, toward the grip of a curving arm that burned and seethed with all the ultimate fires of hell. And Curt fought the controls and tore away again, heading in, heading in . . .

The central sphere of force loomed up like a wall of flame higher than all the skies of space, and then they were in it.

It was as though a million Suns had exploded. The force and fire took the Comet and whirled it tumbling away through a blind and terrible violence. Ezra sagged half-conscious in his seat and he thought that he had come a long,

long way to die. No ship, no body, could live far long in this.

The forces of the cosmic centrifuge would tear their substance, powder it to atoms and then still down into the fine new stuff of atoms, send it out to join with the black dust, to begin the timeless pilgrimage across the empty spaces, to be built at last into the foundations of some new world to circle an alien Sun. Human, robot and android, they would all be one in the end.

The Comet crashed suddenly clear of that hellish tempest of light and force into quiet space. Into a space enclosed by the spanning central sphere of the Birthplace itself, a calm at the very center of cosmic storm.

Dazed, half-stunned, Ezra heard Simon saying, "In here at the center is only one world—the world of the Watchers, where—"

Curt Newton, leaning forward, interrupted with a strange low cry.

"Simon, look! Look! There are other worlds here now—worlds and Suns and —" His voice seemed strangled by a surprise and terror too great for utterance.

Ezra strained desperately to regain use of his dazed eyes. As they began to clear he too peered faintly forward. At first what he saw did not seem so terrifying. Here, in the wide calm space at the heart of the Birthplace, there was a cluster of Suns and planets.

Baby Suns, flaring like new blood, green and white and somber smoky-gold Suns! Planets and moons that circled the changing Suns in sweeping trains, themselves ever changing! Comets that shot in living light between the worlds, meteor swarms rushing and wheeling, an astronomical phantasmagoria enclosed within this comparatively little space!

"You said there were no worlds but one here," Ezra began, bewildered.

"There were none," Curt's face was deathly, and something in it struck at Ezra's heart. "There were none but that little blue world—that alone."

Ezra glimpsed it at the center of the strange, close-packed cluster—a little blue planet that was a geometrically perfect sphere.

"The powers of the Watchers are there—the instruments by which they could tap the Birthplace itself," Curt was saying hoarsely. "And Garrand has been there with those instruments for days."

A comprehension so monstrous that his mind recoiled from it came to Ezra. Gurney. "You mean that Garrand . . ."

He could not finish, could not say it. It was not a thing that could be said in any sane universe.

Curt Newton said it. "Garrand, by tapping the Birthplace, has created the Suns and worlds and comets and meteors of that cluster. He has fallen victim to the old allurements, the strongest in the universe."

"As you almost fell victim once!" Simon Wright warned.

"Can a man make worlds?" Ezra felt shaken and sick inside. "Curt, no—this thing—"

"One who can harness the Birthplace can create at will!" Curt exclaimed. "And the instruments of the Watchers do harness it!"

A kind of madness had come over him. Under his hands the Comet leaped forward at terrible speed. Ezra heard him talking, whether to the others or himself he never knew.

"There is a balance of forces—always a balance! It cannot be tampered with too much. The Watchers left a warning, a plain and dreadful warning."

The ship rushed forward toward the distant small blue world, careening wildly through the unholy stars and worlds and comets whose creation had blasphemed against the natural universe.

SEE PAGE 23 FOR TITLES
IN THE LATEST

AMERICAN THRILLER SERIES

CHAPTER IV

Power of the Watchers

THE blue world shimmered in the light of the monstrous aurora, a perfect jewel, with no height of mountain nor roughness of natural growth to mar its symmetry. Its surface showed a gloss that made Ezra think of porcelain or the deep gleam of polished lapis.

"The Watchers made it long ago," said Curt. "They made it out of the forces of the Birthplace and it was their outpost in this universe, where they studied the secrets of creation. There exists a city . . ."

The Comet sped low across the curving plain. For a time there was nothing but the blank expanse of blue—what was it, glass or rock or jewel-stone or some substance new in the universe? Above them the little suns with their planets wheeled and shone, laced about with the fire of comets, and above those again was the golden sky of the Birthplace. Curt's face, bent forward toward the blue horizon, was intense and pale and somehow alien.

"There it is!" cried Otho, and Curt nodded. Ahead there were the tips of slender spires flashing in the light and a gleam and glow of faceted surfaces that made a web of radiance like the aura sometimes seen in dreams. The spires lifted into graceful height, shaped themselves into the form of a city.

Walls of the same translucent blue enclosed the towers and in the center, rising high above them all, there was a citadel, a cathedral-form as massive and as delicate as the castles that sometimes stand upon the tops of clouds on Earth. And it was dead, the blue and graceful city. The walls, the streets, the flying arches that spanned the upper levels of the towers, all were silent and deserted.

"Garraund's ship," said Curt and Ezra saw it on the plain before the city, an

ugly dark intruder on this world that had not been made for men.

Curt set the Comet down beside it. There was air on this planet, for the Watchers had been oxygen-breathers even though they were not human. The lock of Garraund's ship stood open but there was no life nor movement that Curt could see.

"It seems deserted," he said, "but we'd better make sure."

Ezra roused himself. He went out with the others and somehow the mere act of moving and the possibility of facing a human and comprehensible danger was a relief, almost a pleasure. He walked beside Curt with Otho beyond him. Their boots slipped and rang on the glassy surface. Apart from that there was no sound. The city brooded and was still.

They went through the open airlock into the other ship. There did not seem to be anything to fear, but they moved with the caution of long habit. Ezra found that he was waiting, hoping for action, for attack. He needed some escape valve for the terrors that had grown within him during this flight into the heart of the universe. But the narrow corridors were empty and nothing stirred behind the bulkhead doors.

Then, in the main cabin, they found a man.

He was sitting on the padded bench formed by the tops of the lockers along one wall. He did not move when they came in except to lift his head and look at them. He was a big man, of a breed that Ezra Gurney knew very well, having fought them all his life across the Solar System. But the hardness had gone out of him now. The strong lines of his face had sagged and softened and his eyes held only hopelessness and fear. He had been drinking but he was not drunk.

"You're too late," he said. "Way too late."

Curt went and stood before him. "You're Herrick," he said. "Are you alone?"

"Oh, yes," said Herrick. "I'm alone. There were Sperry and Foshin but they're dead now." Herrick had not shaved for some time. The black stubble on his jaw was flecked with white. He ran his hand across it and his fingers trembled. "I wouldn't be here now," he said, "but I couldn't run the whirle alone. I couldn't take this ship clear back to Earth alone. I couldn't do anything but sit and wait."

Curt said, "Where's Garvand?"

Herrick laughed. It was not pleasant laughter. "You know where he is. Go in and get him. Make him come out. That's how Sperry and Foshin died, trying to make him. I don't know why I'm alive myself. I don't know if I want to be alive after what I've seen."

HHE GOT up. It was hard for him to rise, hard to stand. It was as though fear had eaten the bones away inside him, dissolved the strength from his muscles, leaving him only a hulk, a receptacle for terror. His eyes burned at them.

"You know me," he said. "You know my kind. You can guess why I came with Garvand to get the secret of the Birthplace, what I was going to do with it afterward. I didn't figure Garvand would get in my way. I needed his brains, all right, but there would come a time when I wouldn't need them anymore." He made a gesture, as of brushing away an insect with his hand. "As easy as that." He began to laugh again and it was more weeping than laughter.

"Stop it!" said Curt and Herrick stopped quite obediently. He looked at Curt as though a thought had just come to him, creeping through the fear-veils that shrouded his brain.

"You can get me out of here," he said. There was no threat in his voice, only pleading, the voice of a man caught in quicksand and crying for release. "It's no use going after Garvand. He'll die in there anyway. He won't eat or sleep, he's gone beyond those things, but whatever he thinks he is he's human and he'll

die. Just get! Take me aboard your ship and go!"

"No," said Curt.

Herrick sat down again on the bench. "No," he whispered. "You wouldn't. You're as mad as he is."

Simon said, "Curtis . . ."

He had remained in the shadowy background, listening, but now he came forward and spoke and Curt turned on him.

"No!" he said again. "I can't go away and leave a madman there to play with the forces of the Birthplace till he dies!"

Simon was silent for a time and then he said slowly, "There is truth in what you say but only part of it. And I am sorry, Curtis—for I am no more proof against this madness than you. Even less, perhaps, than you."

"I shall stay out here with Grog to guard the ships and Herrick." His lens-like eyes turned upon Ezra Garvey. "I think that you, of all of us, will resist the lure most strongly. You are like Herrick, a man of your hands—and Herrick, who came to steal the secret, felt only terror when he found it."

He said no more but Ezra knew what he meant. Simon was giving Curt Newton into his hands to save him from some destruction which Ezra did not understand. There was a coldness around Ezra's heart and a sickness in his belly and in his mind a great wish that he had never left Earth.

Curt said to Herrick, "Go to my ship and wait. When we leave you'll go with us."

Herrick shook his head. His eyes lifted slowly to Curt Newton's and dropped again. He said, "You'll never leave."

Ezra left the ship with Curt and Otto and he was sorry that Herrick had said those last three words.

They walked again across the ringing glassy plain, this time toward the city wall and the tall gateway that was in it. The leaves of the portal stood open and there was a look about them as though they had not been touched or closed for more ages than Ezra could think about. He and Otto passed through them, fol-

lowing Curt. Beyond, at a little distance, were two dark statues facing each other across the way. Ezra looked at them and caught his breath in sharply.

"The Watchers?" he whispered. "Were they like that? But what were they then?"

Otho said, "They came from another universe. Simon thought they must have been figments from the formless structure of their bodies."

Out of each amorphous figure stared two round yellow eyes, full of light from the glowing sky and uncannily life-like. Ezra shuddered and hurried by, glancing as he did so at the strangely inscribed letters upon the bases of the statues. He assumed that that was the warning Curt had referred to and he did not want to enquire too closely into it.

"Go quietly," Curt said. "Two men have already died here. We want to get as close to Garrand as we can before he knows we're here."

"Where is he?" demanded Ezra for the city was utterly dead and still. Curt pointed to the citadel.

"In there."

They made their way as silently as they could along the blue translucent street. High above them the slender spires made soft bell-potex where the wind touched them and the crystal spans thrummed like muted harps. And the shimmering castle loomed close before them and the strange stars sparkled in the golden sky. Ezra Carney was afraid.

There was a portal, tall and simply made, with an unknown symbol cut above it. They passed it, treading softly, and stood within a vast cathedral vault that soared upward until the tops of the walls were lost in a golden haze and Ezra realized that it was open to the sky.

The floor was of the same blue substance as the city and in the center of it, under the open vault, was a massive oblong block almost like a gigantic altar except that its top was set with hundreds of little, shining kegs. Beside this block stood Garrand. He was not look-

ing at it nor at the two men and the android who had entered. He was looking upward into that distant sky and through the opening Ezra could see the glittering of stars. Garrand was smiling.

Curt Newton walked out across the floor.

"Don't come any closer," said Curt mildly. "Just where you are—that's close enough."

Curt stopped. Otho had begun to edge away along the curve of the wall very slowly, like a drifting shadow. Ezra stood a little behind Curt and to one side.

GARRAND turned toward them and

For the first time Ezra saw his face quite clearly. Unshaven and deathly white, its cheeks and temples sunken with hunger and exhaustion, its eyes dark and burning, there was a beauty about it that had never been there before, something sublime and glorious and calm, as a sea is calm or a frozen river, with the potentials of destruction sleeping in it. And Ezra understood the danger that Simon had spoken of in regard to Curt. He understood now what the power that was here could do to a man.

"So, after all, you followed me," Garrand said. "Well, it doesn't matter now." He stepped behind the block that was like an altar, so that it was between him and Curt.

Curt said quietly, "You must leave here, Garrand. You'll have to leave some time, you know. You're only human."

"Am I?" Garrand laughed. His hand lightly caressed the bank of little shining kegs. "Am I? I was once. I was a little physicist who thought adding to scientific knowledge supremely important and I stole and risked my life to come here for more knowledge." His eyes lit up. "I came searching for a scientific secret and I found the source of godhead!"

"So now, because you've tampered with the Watchers' powers and tapped the Birthplace, you're a god?" Curt's

tone was ironic but Ezra could see the sweat standing out on his forehead.

Garrand took no offense. He was armored by an egocentric emotion so great that he merely smiled wearily and said, "You can go now—all of you. I dislike chattering. I dislike it so much that I will quite willingly call destruction in here to engulf you unless you go."

His fingers had ceased straying, had come to rest on certain keys. Ezra Gurney felt a slow freezing of his flesh. He whispered hoarsely, "You'll have to kill him, Curt."

He knew the swiftness with which Newton could draw and fire the weapon at his belt. But Curt made no move.

"Can I fire into that bank of controls?" Curt muttered. "Otho's speed is our only chance."

He flung up his hand, his fingers crooked. He said loudly, "Garrand, I warn you—"

His gesture had been both a faint to draw attention, a signal. A signal that sent Otho lunging toward the oblong altar.

The phenomenal swiftness of the android, the reaction speed of nerves and muscles that were not human, made Otho's movement almost blurring to the eye. But Garrand saw and with a low cry he pressed the keys.

To Ezra, in the next moment, the air around them seemed suddenly charged with power. The golden haze spun about him, darkened, thickened, all in a heartbeat. He felt the imminent materialization of an agency of destruction drawn from the great matrix of force about them.

He glimpsed through the thickening haze Otho pulling Garrand back from the altar. He saw Curt leaping in, his face desperate and raising the depressed keys.

And Ezra felt the half-materialized shadowy force around him melting back into nothingness. "What—" he stammered, still standing frozen.

"Death," said Curt. "As to the form of it who knows but Garrand? Anyway,

it's over now." His voice was unsteady and his hands shook on the keys. He looked down. Garrand had gone limp in Otho's arms. Ezra thought at first that he was dead and then he saw the shallow breathing, the faint twitching of the mouth.

"Hunger and exhaustion," said Curt. "Strala. He was already at the end of his rope. Get him back to the ship, Otho, and have Simon take care of him."

Otho lifted the unconscious man without effort but he did not yet move away. "Aren't you coming, Curt?"

"Not yet." He glanced upward through the opening at the brilliant stars that swarmed where no stars ought to be. "I can't leave this imbalance at the heart of the Birthplace. The Watchers were careful about that. They built their one small planet at the exact center of stress, where it wouldn't upset anything. But those creations of Garrand's—I don't dare leave them here, Otho."

Still Otho did not move and Curt said, "Go on, Otho. Garrand needs help."

SLOWLY and reluctantly the android turned and as he did so he looked at Ezra, a look of warning, a pleading look. Then he went out, carrying Garrand.

Curt Newton bent over the keys. "I haven't forgotten," he whispered to himself. "How could anyone ever forget?" He touched the gleaming keys, not pressing them, just touching them lightly and feeling the power that was in them, the unimaginable control of matter.

Ezra said hoarsely, "What are you going to do?"

Curt looked upward to where the little suns swam in the golden haze, the little suns that could create havoc in this cosmic womb where only the seed of matter belonged.

"Watch," he said. "I am going to dissolve what Garrand created."

Ezra watched. Slowly, carefully, Curt pressed a certain pattern on the keys and around a ruby star waves and bands of golden force began to flicker like faint auroras. They grew and strength-

ened and became streams of raw electrons, pouring their substance into the little Sun.

Ezra shielded his eyes, but not soon enough. The star had become a nova, but without the second, the collapsed stage of novae. The fury of electronic force launched upon it from outside in this universal vortex of such forces had swept away each fragment of the exploding atoms to return them to the parent cloud.

The ruby star had ceased to exist and its worlds had vanished with it.

Swifter now, more surely, Curt's hands flashed across the keys. And Ezra Gurney cowered beside the altar, blinded, stunned, shaken by the savage explosions of far-distant matter, riven and burst apart.

How long he crouched there while the great lights flared in the sky and the cosmic hammers beat he never knew. But there came a time when everything was still and he looked up and saw Curt standing there with his hands motionless on the keys and his head strained back so that he could search the farthest reaches of the sky.

He spoke and Curt did not answer. He touched him and spoke again, and it was like speaking to a statue except that under his fingers he could feel the subtle tremors of Curt's hard flesh, the faint quivering.

"Curt!" he cried out. And Curt very slowly lowered his head and looked at him with a kind of amazement in his eyes, as though he had forgotten Ezra Gurney.

"Is it finished, Curt?"

"Yes. It's finished."

"Then come away."

Newton's gaze, the unfamiliar gaze that did not see small things like men but looked on larger distances, slipped away to the banks of keys and upward to the sky again.

"In a moment," he said. "In just a moment."

Two red bars burned across the bones of his cheeks and the rest of his face

was like marble. Ezra saw in it the beginning of the exaltation, the terrible beauty that had marked the face of Garrand. Curt smiled and the sinews of his hands moved delicately as he stroked his fingers across the keys.

"The worlds that I could make," he whispered. "Garrand was only a little man. I could create things he never dreamed of."

"Curt!" cried Ezra in a panic. "Come away!" But his voice was swallowed up in dreams and Curt whispered very softly, "I wouldn't keep them. I would dissolve them afterward. But I could create..."

His fingers were forming a pattern on the keys. Ezra looked down at his gnarled old hands and knew that they were not strong enough. He looked at his gun and knew that he could not use it in any way. Searching desperately for a way to pierce through the dreams he cried, "Could you create another Earth?"

For awhile he was not sure that Curt had heard him, not sure but that he was beyond hearing. Then a vaguely startled look came into Curt's eyes and he said, "What?"

"Could you create another Earth, Curt? Could you put the mountains and the seas together and build the cities and fill them with men and women and the voices of children? Could you create another Otho or Grag or Simon?"

Curt slowly looked down at his fingers, carved and hungry on the waiting keys, and a kind of horror flashed across his face. He snatched his hands away and spun around, turning his back to the altar. He looked sick, and shamed, but the dreams were no longer shadowing his face, and Ezra began to breathe again.

"Thanks, Ezra," he said hoarsely. "Now let's go. Let's go, while I can."

THE black cloud lay behind them and the Comet fled away from it like a frightened thing, back through the great blazing clusters of Suns that had now

ne terrors for them. Curt Newton sat silently at the controls and his face was so brooding that Ezra Gurney did not venture to speak.

Ezra looked ahead because he did not want to look back into the main cabin. He knew that what Simon was doing there was perfectly harmless and utterly necessary but there was something so uncanny about it that he did not want to see it being done.

He had looked in once and seen Simon hovering over the strange projector that Grog and Otto had rigged above the heads of the dragged unconscious Garrand and Herrick. He had come away from there quickly.

He sat unspooking beside Curt, watching the great clusters wheel slowly past them until at last Simon Wright came gliding into the control-room.

"It is done," said Simon. "Garrand and Herrick will not wake for many hours. When they do they won't remember."

Curt looked at him. "You're sure that you expunged every memory of the Birthplace?"

"Absolutely sure. I used the scanner to block every memory-path on that subject—and checked by questioning them hypnotically. They know nothing of the Birthplace. You'll have to have a story ready for them."

Curt nodded. "We picked them up out here in deep space when their ship cracked up in cosmic ray research. That fits the circumstances—they'll never doubt it."

Ezra shivered a little. Even now the blocking of part of a man's memories, the taking away forever of a bit of his experience, seemed an eerie thing to do.

Curt Newton saw his shiver and understood it. He said, "It doesn't harm them, Ezra—and it's necessary."

"Very necessary, if the secret of the Birthplace is not to get out again," said Simon.

There was a little silence among them and the ship crawled on and on through the cosmic glare and gloom. Ezra saw

that the somber shadow on Newton's face deepened as he looked out through the wilderness of Suns and nebulae toward the far, far spark of Sol.

"But someday," Curt said slowly, "someday not too far in the future, many men will be pushing out through these spaces. They'll find the Birthplace sooner or later. And then what?"

Simon said, "We will not be here when that happens."

"But they'll do it. And what will happen when they do?"

Simon had no answer for that nor had Ezra Gurney. And Curt spoke again, his voice heavy with foreboding.

"I have sometimes thought that life, human life, intelligent life, is merely a deadly agent by which a stellar system achieves its own doom in a cosmic cycle far vaster and stranger than anyone has dreamed. For see—stars and planets are born from primal nothingness and they cool and the cooling worlds spawn life and life grows to ever higher levels of intelligence and power until . . ."

There was an ironical twist to Curt's lips as he paused and then went on, ". . . until the life of that world becomes intelligent enough to tap the energies of the cosmos! When that happens is it inevitable that fallible mortals should use those energies so disastrously that they finally destroy their own worlds and stars? Are life and intelligence merely a lethal seed planted in each universe, a seed that must inevitably destroy that universe?"

Simon said slowly, "That is a terrible thought, Curt. But I deny its inevitability. Long ago the Watchers found the Birthplace, yet they did not try to use its powers."

"We are not like the Watchers, we men," Curt said bitterly. "You saw what it did to Garrand and to me."

"I know," said Simon. "But perhaps men will be as wise as the Watchers were by the time they find the Birthplace. Perhaps they too will then be powerful enough to renounce power. We can only hope."

How's Your Voltage?

NEW FINDINGS POINT TO THE ELECTRICAL BASIS OF LIFE



ROBOTS come and go in science fiction, but we have yet to see a story in which a human being drives into a service station and had himself recharged electrically. Yet that day may not be as far off as you think. Every restaurant may have a recharger to give its patrons an instant lift as well as a meal.

The theory that all life has an electrical basis has been with us for awhile. But it has been somewhat vaguely expressed and limited to certain demonstrable forms, such as measuring brain waves.

New experiments indicate, however, that it goes much farther than that, and evidence is being piled up in laboratories all over the country. At Yale, Dr. Harold S. Burr has measured the electrical potential of a kernel of corn, the resulting reading on a galvanometer giving a rough prediction of the seed's sprouting ability and its fall size at maturity.

At Pennsylvania State College, a group of researchers, working with the Army Signal Corps, demonstrated that magnets feed up a region's "harvest potential" completely.

Similar magnetic fields set up in the waters of British Columbia by the Canadian government were found to affect sharply the houting "assault" of salmon. And electrical devices are known to attract fish and eels of many kinds.

Back at Yale, Dr. Miles and Dr. Beck of the Psychology Department have been trying to track down the mechanism of man's sense of smell and again have come up indications of electricity.

Man's (and presumably animal's) ability to detect odors, they believe, is actually a "broadcast" by the nose of infra-red rays, with wave lengths running from 7.5 to 14 microns. Once the correct wave length for each odor is established, it will be the easiest thing in the world to broadcast any scent desired and the perfume industry will move into new fields.

Moving pictures and television broadcasts which will combine three-dimensional images with color and controlled sounds will achieve an illusion of reality little short of life itself. Nor is olfactory stimulation the least important of these. The peculiar attribute of sound is that it brings back memories more effectively than almost any other type of stimulus. Thus cinema or television plays spiced with correct odors will make a deeper effect initially, remain in the memory longer and be more easily recalled than ever before.

Charles Katharine, General Motors' inventive genius, has been after the secret of photosynthesis for years, and many of his research teams have discovered some of the sun's secrets. They have made pure better in the test tube, without the help of soil or cow in any way, utilizing sun power. And they believe that another ten years may see the whole fabulous secret revealed, of how chlorophyll turns the electrical energy of the sun into food. With that, man's fear that he will outgrow the food supplies of the planet are ended.

Even the search for a cancer cure has branched against the electrical theory of life. Measurement of nerve fields has demonstrated that there is a considerable rise in voltage weeks before any other symptom of cancer appears. This has produced not only a cancer test, but a new and profitable area of research towards a cure.

These are tangible, material results. There are other lines of research, such as Dr. Rhine's experiments in ESP at Duke, which add to the general picture. Out of all these individual bits of research, going on independently in colleges, laboratories, even in basements and attics all over the country, will come day enough the answer to the last and most baffling question of all—what is life?

—The Editor

Here's the Kind of NEW MEN I Build!

Do YOU Want to Be One?



ARTHUR HIXON

Tough guy after
several years in
the Navy at
the Coliseum, ap-
pears in magnificent
development in
"Dynamis-Tension"



...And I'll PROVE in Just
7 DAYS I Can Make YOU One!

That's all I ask—SEVEN DAYS! In the first week I'll absolutely PROVE that I can give you, too, the kind of body men respect and women admire! You will actually see and feel the improvement in even this short time. And as the weeks go by you will see yourself transformed into a **NEW MAN**—a stronger, healthier, more handsome man!

I was once a skinny, tired weakling of only 7 stone. I didn't know what real health or strength were. I was afraid to fight—afraid to be seen in a bathing costume.

YOU'LL SEE AND FEEL RESULTS IN ONE WEEK!

Then I discovered the amazing secret that changed me, the magic, and "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—the title I won twice. My secret is "Dynamis-Tension." It is the secret, natural method of developing you inside and out! It not only can give YOU the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror... it also digs down into your system after such needless joy-killing conditions as ordinary constipation, indigestion, underweight and overweight.

My "Dynamis-Tension" method will make a **NEW MAN** of you in double-quick time—and I'm ready to PROVE it to you in a

7-day TRIAL OFFER. Unless you get results in the first week it costs you absolutely NOTHING!

Send for 48-page book FREE!

Let me show you the amazing results produced for thousands of other men! I'll send you my famous book: "Building Health and Strength." It's a valuable book and it's FREE. From the coupon TO-DAY addressed to:
CHARLES ATLAS
(Dept. 147-G),
3, Dean Street,
London, W.1



CHARLES ATLAS

(Dept. 147-G), 3, Dean St., London, W.1

I want the proof that your system of "Dynamis-Tension" will make me a NEW MAN. Send me your book, "Building Health and Strength," FREE, and details of your amazing 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER.

Name (PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE NAME)

Address